

CONSUMER MAGAZINE OF THE YEAR

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May 2014

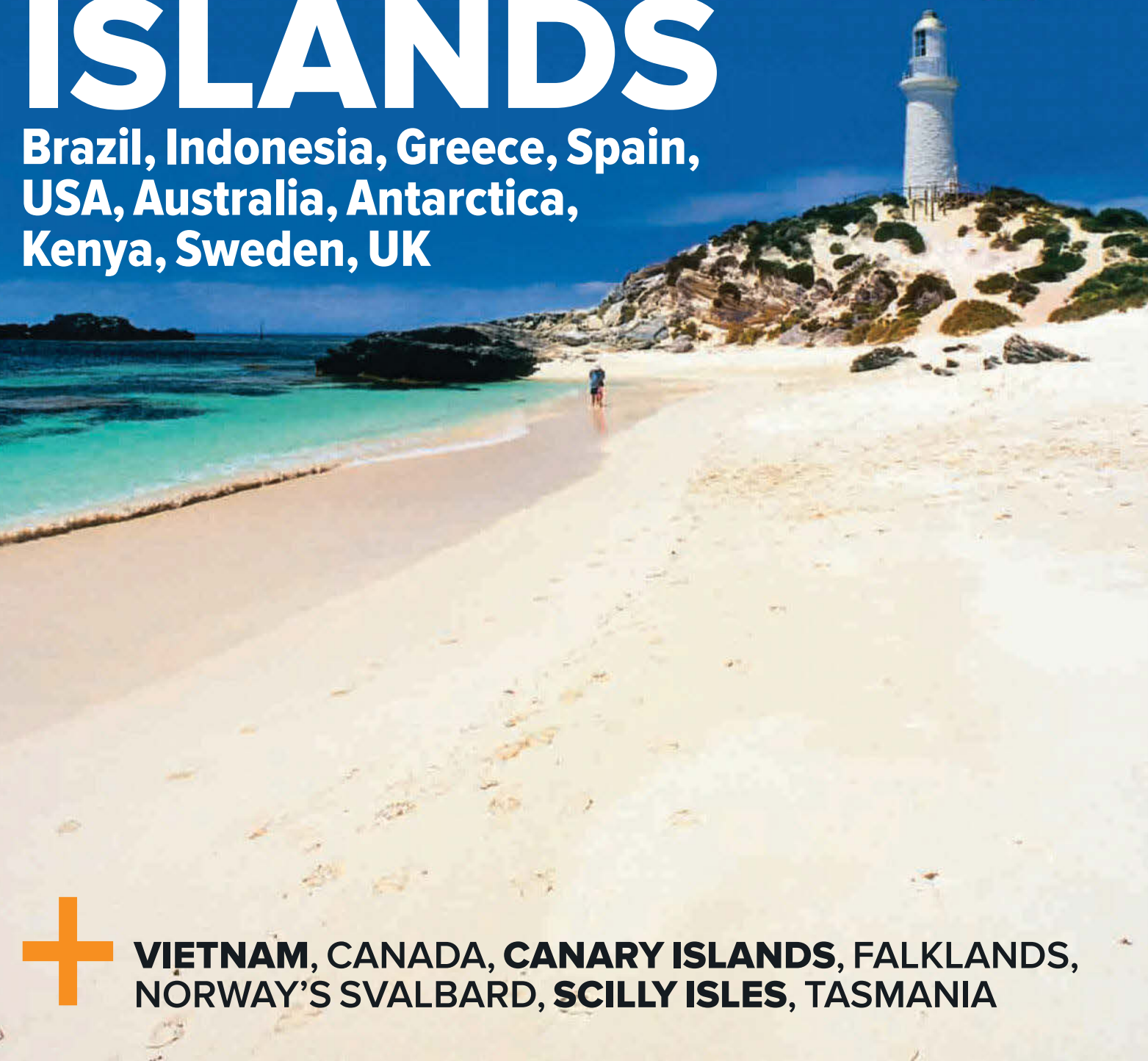
Wanderlust

SECRET ISLANDS

Brazil, Indonesia, Greece, Spain,
USA, Australia, Antarctica,
Kenya, Sweden, UK

Win!

Trips to Svalbard,
Nevada, Croatia and
Faroe Islands!
See page 4...



+ VIETNAM, CANADA, CANARY ISLANDS, FALKLANDS,
NORWAY'S SVALBARD, SCILLY ISLES, TASMANIA

Natural Wonders of the Caribbean

in Saint Lucia and Dominica

Whether it's the thrum of the hummingbird's wing or the crash of the Caribbean waves, **Saint Lucia** and **Dominica** are island havens for nature lovers. Away from the beaches, rainforests teem with endemic bird species in kaleidoscopic colours, whilst the azure seas offer wondrous wildlife encounters with whales and dolphins. These unsung islands offer unforgettable adventures that will stay with you for a lifetime.

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Twin treasures
The Pitons loom over Soufrière in St Lucia, one of our 'Isles of Adventure' (page 117)

Welcome



During the *Wanderlust* World Guide Awards a few years ago, presenter Mark Carwardine ran through an amusing list of the silliest questions guides had been asked. One was "Is there water all the way around this island?"

Fortunately the best guides are more than up to answering dozens of questions a day, of all degrees of difficulty. You will find this year's shortlist of these remarkable (and patient) heroes on p22. Do let us know if you've travelled with them.

This issue we celebrate those pieces of land that do have water all the way around them – with our Secret Islands special (p108). One of the things I love each issue is how much I learn. Having been lucky enough to visit Svalbard (p133), I did know that it was home to the world's most northerly settlement at Ny Ålesund, but did you know that the world's most southerly British hotel is in the Falklands (p46)?

And did you know that Vietnam is one of the world's major exporters of wood veneer (p10), that about half the world's Irish moss actually comes from Canada (p76) and that the Canary Islands have metre-long lizards (p90)? See, it's not only guides that have all the answers!

Happy travels,

Lyn

Lyn Hughes
Editor-In-Chief/Publisher/Co-founder

THE TEAM

And what they've been up to this month?



PHOEBE SMITH

◆ EDITOR ◆

Discovering PEI: Canada's secret landmass and home to Anne of Green Gables
SEE PAGE 76



SARAH BAXTER

◆ ASSOCIATE EDITOR ◆

Picturing herself on any one of the 19 islands featured in our secret islands special
SEE PAGE 108



TOM HAWKER

◆ PRODUCTION EDITOR ◆

Professing his passion for penguins and Falklands' wartime history
SEE PAGE 46



ALEX GREGG

◆ EDITORIAL ASSISTANT ◆

Falling in love with Arctic foxes and polar bears researching Svalbard
SEE PAGE 133

WHAT'S ON THE COVER?

Subscribers now get a special and exclusive cover that showcases our great travel photography. Picked up on the newsstand? You'll notice we're now *Wanderlust Travel* – the same award-winning content as the subscriber edition, but now with a great new look.



Wanderlust
consumer magazine of the year



SUBSCRIBE TO WANDERLUST & RECEIVE A FREE £50 VOUCHER

See p44 for details

Wanderlust

For people with a passion for travel

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In memory of co-founder & publisher Paul Morrison

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This issue was brought to you in part by....



JULIA BRADBURY

TV presenter and worldwide wanderer

Amid fronting shows like *Countryfile*, *Watchdog*, and *Wainwright Walks*, Julia has found five minutes to chat to us about her love of travel (p20)

Mountain, desert, ocean or jungle... which are you?
Mountain. It has to be mountain.

First great travel experience?
Greece with my great grandmother when I was a little girl and getting my first pair of flippers, of which my sister gave me one and my mother gave me the other, separately – they were bright blue. I was five.

Favourite journey?

Trans-Siberian Express about four years ago – it was amazing.

Top five places worldwide?

South Africa; New York; Nicaragua; Berlin; UK (Lake District and Peak District).

Passport stamp you're proudest of?

Outer Mongolia, Ulan Bator!

Passport stamp you'd most like to have?

Argentina. Never been. **Guilty travel pleasure?** Um... hair dryer. I've got naturally curly hair so if I want straight hair then it's got to be a hair dryer. Bit girly isn't it?



TIM NICHOLLS

Worldly kayak instructor for Outside Expeditions PEI, Canada

Dipping and diving, Tim has been teaching kayaking for over 20 years. This issue *Wanderlust* editor Phoebe Smith had the pleasure of taking to the water with him on Prince Edward Island (p76)

Mountain, desert, ocean or jungle... which are you?

Ocean, though I did some jungle paddling in Panama in December and really liked it.

First great travel experience?

Kayaking and snorkelling in Belize.

Favourite journey?

Northern Vietnam (including Hanoi). I trained and worked with Vietnamese guides, kayaking in Halong Bay and mountain biking in the hills. Because I was with local guides I got to experience and see areas, people and food many visitors don't.

Top five places worldwide?

Vietnam; Nicaragua; Guatemala; Australia; New Zealand.

Passport stamp you're proudest of?

Vietnam.

Passport stamp you would most like to have?

Sri Lanka and Burma.

Guilty travel pleasure?

Doing a circuit tour of US cities in the fall/winter to see NFL Football games live.



DEE CAFFARI

First woman to sail unsupported around the world in both directions

Dee holds more sailing records than you can shake a boom at, this issue she offers her skills to novices in our Masterclass (p62)

Mountain, desert, ocean or jungle... which are you?

Ocean for sure.

First great travel experience?

As a child I learnt to navigate and understand the weather from my father, but my first big holiday alone was a diving/sailing trip in Kenya. We sailed a boat from Kilifi to Pemba Island; it was an amazing adventure.

Favourite journey?

On my first sail around the world we did legs of the [clipper] race and stopped in seven places. Our longest stop was in New Zealand and my partner and I rented a camper van to tour the two islands. We loved it: glacier walking, bungee jumping, wine tasting and canyoning.

Top five places worldwide?

Oman; New Zealand; Caribbean; France; UK.

Passport stamp you're proudest of?

All over the Middle East.

Passport stamp you would most like to have?

I would love to visit more of South America and Asia.

Guilty travel pleasure?

A good book is essential.

Wanderlust Mission Statement

Wanderlust aims to inform and inspire all your travel adventures. We strive to bring you the most trusted and reliable information in the world. That's why we are always upfront about whether our writers have travelled independently or with a tour company. When a tour operator has been used we always try to use those who've scored a minimum satisfaction rating of 85% from readers in our annual Awards and we never guarantee positive coverage. Responsible and sustainable travel is at the heart of everything we do.



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May 2014



■ Cover Story

108 Secret islands... and the ones that deserve a second chance

Ever heard of the Dahlak Archipelago? Half of WL Towers hadn't either! We've picked out 12 secret must-see islands just like this one, as well as seven that you'd never think of visiting. Discover the isles of adventure here...

■ Special feature

22 Guide Awards Shortlist

From 2,000 nominations to just eight finalists – we've been busy narrowing down your worthy choices for our annual – and unique – celebration of travel's unsung heroes

360 – NEED TO KNOW

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- 73 **Traveller's guide to... Sandals** Editor Phoebe Smith puts the best six models on the market through their paces

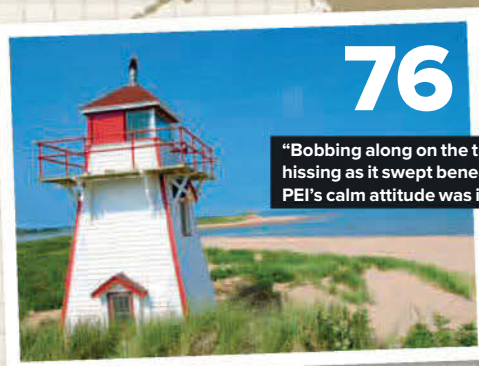
WIN!

A Croatian sailing voyage with G Adventures p88

Trip for two to Nevada p106

An Arctic expedition cruise to Svalbard p130

A wild adventure to the Faroe Islands p139



"Bobbing along on the tranquil waters, eel grass hissing as it swept beneath my kayak's hull... PEI's calm attitude was infectious" **Phoebe Smith**

Canada, p76



"Like a TARDIS fashioned from Cornish granite, Tresco, expands once you step ashore. There are activities aplenty; castles, coves, real ales, weird plants, seals and sunshine are abundant" **Sarah Baxter**

"Part of the Falklands' new wealth comes from wildlife tourism, an experience that is, I was to discover, every bit as intimate as visiting the Galápagos" **Mark Stratton**

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Falklands, p46

GET A BOOK PUBLISHED WITH...

Peter Moore, p65



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46 Falklands From wildlife-watching to booming fisheries – see how life on this 778-island archipelago has come a long way since the conflicts of the eighties

76 Canada Discover the laidback, tranquil nature of Prince Edward Island, the place where Canadians choose to holiday but don't tell anyone else – it's a secret...

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102 Your Story Reader David Higham discovers the real *Road to Mandalay* on a trip down Burma's beautiful and enticing Irrawaddy River

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105 This Month You Have Been... Skiing past Mont Blanc; falling head-over-heels for penguins; enjoying the sun in Barcelona; and creating a definite conversation piece by collaging old bits of currency together. You lucky so-and-sos!

POCKET GUIDES

133 Travel Icon Discover

Norwegian outpost is a place of icy wonder and home to one of the most fascinating, deadly creatures on earth: the polar bear

135 First 24 Hours Tasmania's second-oldest city of Hobart is a punchline no more – thriving with modernism, culture and cuisine

137 Short Break We head for a UK break unlike any other – to the tiny isle of Tresco, a beach-peppered landmass that's officially the warmest place in Britain

Svalbard, p133



Svalbard is the icy desert at the top of the world. A voyage here might yield sightings of its 19 species of marine mammals, while on land you may spot Arctic foxes, reindeer and polar bears...

Scilly Isles, p137

El Hierro, p90

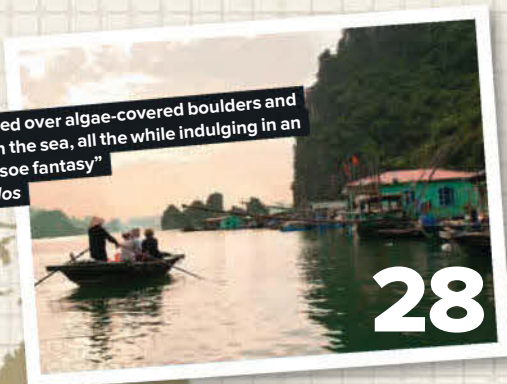
"It was lava at first sight. Through my plane window the lonely chunk of serrated grey, draped with a ragged green shawl, appeared adrift in the white-capped Atlantic Ocean"
Martin Symington



90

Vietnam, p28

"I scrambled over algae-covered boulders and paddled in the sea, all the while indulging in an inner-Crusoe fantasy"
Nick Boulos



28

TALKING HEADS

Julia Bradbury
p20

"Nicaragua is an incredible destination and still largely undiscovered – even by its people. I think a lot of them have never seen the eastern side of the island"
Julia Bradbury

Hobart, p135

360°



V i e w f i n d e r





SACRED STALLIONS Iceland

Photographer: ©Tim Flach

Horses hold a precious place in Icelandic culture, almost sacred and symbolic. So petite, yet majestic and powerful, Icelandic horses live a wild existence, grazing in the highlands. Their diminutive size, easy demeanour and distinctive gait is the result of a millennium of breeding in the harsh, predator-free landscapes. This striking image is just one of dozens of animal snaps featured in Tim Flach's *Evolution*, a book of surprisingly intimate and contemplative shots. Often amusing, always extraordinary, it brings you eye-to-eye with the ongoing wonders of nature.

© stern Fotografie 74 – *Evolution*,
(teNeues; teneues.com; £27), out now.





HUMAN BEAUTY New Zealand

Photographer: ©Jimmy Nelson Pictures

BV (beforethey.com)

"If we do not document these last unspoilt men and their rituals, they will disappear without a trace." So reads the foreword of Jimmy Nelson's *Before They Pass Away*. This photography portfolio celebrates the uniqueness of dwindling or at-risk communities, including New Zealand's Maori (pictured), famed for their distinctive tattooing and haka dance. *Before They Pass Away* (teNeues; teneues.com; £70), is out now (also available as a Collector's Edition XXL).



NATION FACING FORWARDS

Phu Tho Province, Vietnam

Photographer: **Robert Dodge**

It's been nearly four decades since the end of the Vietnam War, but the scars are still visible. Despite the pain of the conflict though, most of the country's inhabitants are looking forwards, switching their focus to national growth. Robert Dodge's *Vietnam 40 Years Later* chronicles the country's changes over the years through images such as this. It depicts a man drying wood veneer, which is now one of Vietnam's biggest exports to the rest of South-East Asia.

***Vietnam 40 Years Later* (Damiani, €40) is out now.**



■ Readers' Pictures

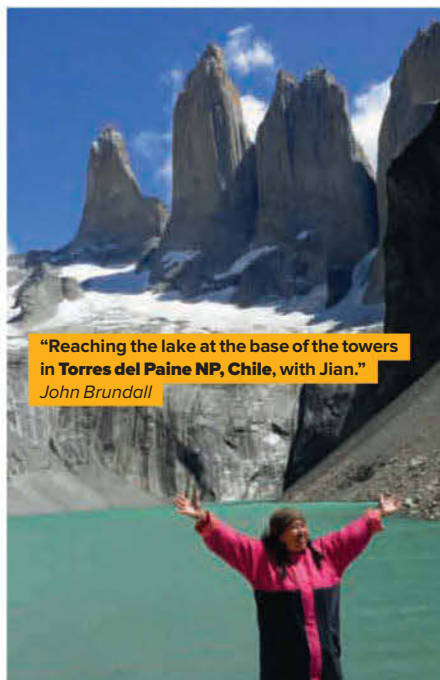
YOUR PHOTOS

Been somewhere beautiful? Done something amazing?

Email fromtheroad@wanderlust.co.uk – make us jealous!



"Basking in El Totumo Mud Volcano, **Cartagena, Colombia**. You couldn't move without the help of the guide, proving you really can't swim in mud!"
Samantha Stevenson



"Reaching the lake at the base of the towers in **Torres del Paine NP, Chile**, with Jian."
John Brundall



"Wearing my Fenerbahce shirt at **Machu Picchu, Peru** – I'm a subscriber from Turkey and a big fan of the football club; everywhere we travel, my wife takes a photo of me with the team shirt on."
Seckin Yilmaz



"Loving **Arches National Park** in **Utah**, on the first part of our adventure honeymoon."
Helen Quinn



"Husky-sledding in **Finland** during my **Finnish Wilderness Week**."
Claire Williams

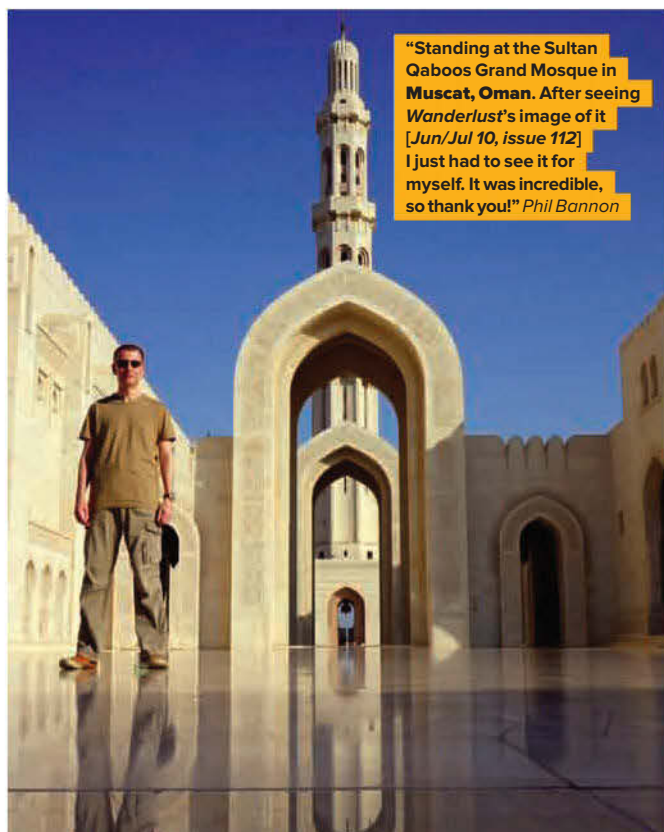
Where does your Wanderlust take you?

Every month we ask 'Where does your Wanderlust take you?', giving you a chance to win a goody bag including an adaptable **Insect Shield Buff®** – a new travel accessory to protect you from sun, wind and bugs (RRP £20). But can you do better than Claire (*above*)? We want to see where your Wanderlust takes you and where you take your Wanderlust!

Take your magazine with you on your next trip and share a pic with us. Post it on our Facebook wall, tweet it to us at [@wanderlustmag](https://twitter.com/wanderlustmag) or email it to fromtheroad@wanderlust.co.uk.



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"Standing at the **Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque** in **Muscat, Oman**. After seeing Wanderlust's image of it [Jun/Jul 10, issue 112] I just had to see it for myself. It was incredible, so thank you!" *Phil Bannon*



"Visiting mountain gorillas in **Rwanda** and **Uganda**. This huge silverback later brushed past my leg. You're supposed to be seven metres away from the gorillas but they don't know that!" *Jan Land*

12 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW THIS MONTH...

Your May essentials: Julia Bradbury on flip-flops; seasonal Scandi eats; brilliant books; how to sail to Europe's best beach

1 ■ New Frontiers Don't dismiss bus travel

As North America's Greyhound Lines celebrate 100 years of service, we look at why travelling by bus is the easiest way to have a proper adventure...

Greyhound, aka 'The Dirty Dog', one of the most iconic bus services in the world, celebrates its centenary on 21 May. But despite decades of stalwart service, transporting travellers between 3,800 North American cities, Greyhound – and worldwide bus travel in general – remains much maligned. Train journeys boast romance; planes win on speed; boats offer luxury. But buses? Not so much. However, we reckon they're underrated.

Graham Hughes – holder of the Guinness World Record for visiting 201 countries overland – agrees that in terms of gaining insider tips and meeting locals, buses can't be beaten: "I could find out a lot more about Zambia by sitting on a bus next to someone, rather than reading it in a book or online."

It's not just about meeting people; buses can give access to cultural wonders and little-known sights that no other form of transport can reach. "Journeys are often just as interesting as destinations, yet we are so keen to arrive that we've lost the knack of enjoying it," notes Nicky Gardner, co-editor of Bradt's *Bus-Pass Britain*. "Local buses are

sociable, cheap and fun; these are community assets that we should cherish and use."

Hopping aboard a bus or coach is also typically the cheapest option. It may not have the best reputation for comfort, but budget-conscious travellers can't argue with Megabus UK's £1.50 intercity routes or the cheap networks that cross parts of Asia and Central America.

The best thing is that bus travel doesn't have to mean uncomfortable seating. Consider Japan where the Willer Express Buses from

Tokyo to Kyoto offer cocoon-style seats, foot massagers and private TVs – all for ¥3,440 (£20). It also runs overnight, saving hotel fees; the same trip by bullet train is nearly quadruple the price.

"Japan's bullet trains are so famous that travelling by bus is not even considered by most visitors to Japan," agrees Kylie Clark from Japan's National Tourist Organization. "However, it's actually a convenient, comfortable and cheap way to get around."

Cheap, cheerful and offering unexpected encounters with people and places? When it comes to travel by bus there should be only one answer – tickets please!

'Buses give access to cultural wonders other transport can't reach'



© Greyhound



■ The Nitty Gritty

5 reasons why you should consider travel by bus

Buses have a reputation for being slow and uncomfortable. But here's why you need to embrace the wheeled beast.

1 Cost Buses may take longer than planes or trains, but usually cost a lot less. Brits can find cheap fares on National Express; Stateside, the Greyhound network offers many cheap options (eg NYC to Chicago for \$85). Megabus runs services in Europe, the US and Canada.

2 Access Sometimes a bus is the only option. For example, many high Alpine Swiss spots are only serviced by PostBuses, making a bus trip all but essential if you want to get into the mountains.

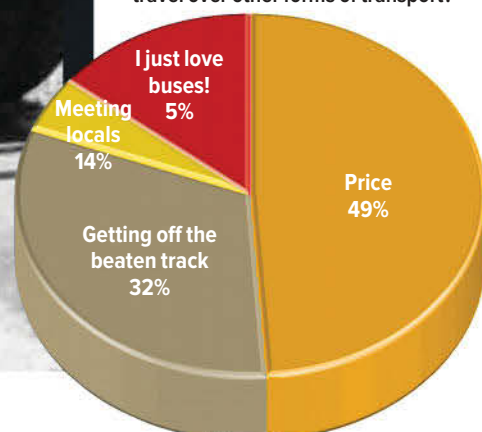
3 Comfort It's not all roughing it – many buses now offer comfy seating and Wi-Fi. The new MegabusGold sleeper service from London to Scotland even provides a bunk bed, onesie, toothbrush and refreshments, from £15 each way!

4 Travel like a local Riding a bus can be a travel rite of passage. Take the Guatemalan chicken bus: crammed quarters, Latin music, lively seatmates. Comfy? Perhaps not. But the chance to chat to local people is a real bus-plus.

5 Eco-friendly A full bus is one of the greenest ways to travel – especially if you pick the right vehicle. For example, London's hybrid buses reduce emissions by 30% compared to diesel buses.

■ Online reader poll

This month we asked you: What factor would make you pick bus travel over other forms of transport?



New Routes

GO NOW...

Outstanding
The Callanish
Standing Stones
date back to
3000 BC

2

New ferry to Europe's 'Best Island'

? Why go?

Scotland's Isle of Lewis is a continent-beater. Despite its non-tropical climes, TripAdvisor has just named the Outer Hebridean spot the Best Island in Europe – no doubt because of its ancient history, air of mystery and sheer good looks.

Getting there's become easier too. A new vessel will soon run the route between Ullapool and Lewis's capital, Stornoway: the *MV Loch Seaforth* is faster, larger and greener than its predecessor.

So why catch the new ferry?

First, Lewis is an archeologist's paradise: visit the Callanish Standing Stones (3,000 BC), the Iron Age Dun Carloway *broch* (fort) and the restored thatched cottages of the Gearrannan Blackhouse crofting village (where you can stay the night). Lewis is a wildlife haven too. Abundant seabirds nest on the rocks; red deer and golden eagles frequent the south-west; dolphins, seals and minke whales inhabit the waters.

And as befitting any good island, it has superb beaches. Some the best can be found at Uig, Tolsta and Bostadh. Even better, as most of the island's population lives in Stornoway, you may well find that you have the sand to yourself.

**Where to stay?**

Traditional Manish Cottage (www.housetrip.com/en/rentals/64083) is on the coast of the Isle of Harris, which is attached to Lewis; from £61pn.

**Get there now!**

The *MV Isle of Lewis* runs Ullapool-Stornoway daily; car returns cost £96. The *MV Loch Seaforth* will launch soon (see www.calmac.co.uk).

**Or how about these...**

EasyJet now flies Gatwick-Tel Aviv thrice-weekly, from £90.49 each way; easyjet.com. Monarch's new routes from Manchester and Luton to Naples launch 2 May. From £61.49 one way; monarch.co.uk.

Travel Gear

3 BUY THIS...
Teva Riva Peak

£140, www.teva.co.uk



Better known for their first-rate sport sandals, rather than hardcore hiking footwear, Teva has now taken a step up with

its new walking boots. Constructed with a robust full grain leather upper, a firm Vibram sole and a breathable, waterproof eVent membrane, these are ideal for your next challenging trek.

Film

4 WATCH THIS...
Tracks

In cinemas on 25 April



In 1977, armed only with four camels, a dog and a gutful of resilience, Robyn Davidson set out from Palm Springs aiming for the Indian Ocean – 2,700km away, through some of Australia's most bruising desert. This dreamlike, dust-dazzled movie recreates the epic wander, with Mia Wasikowska playing the determined Davidson.

Clothing

5 WEAR THIS...
Kora ShoLa Zip

£105, www.kora.net



Baselayers are vital at keeping you cool when it's hot and warm when it's cold. Usually they're made from Merino wool, but Kora think they have found a better alternative – yak wool. The key ingredient in their own soft Hima-Layer fabric is sourced from nomadic communities in the Himalaya, and offers wearers a great warmth to weight. Cosy!

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rediscover my
sense of wonder.



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World Food

EAT THIS...



6

It's the season to eat Scandinavian

Scandinavia stretches from lush Danish grasslands to Arctic extremes. It's a place best known for its wilderness, encircled by water and at the mercy of well-defined seasons – all of which strongly influence its cuisine. Consequently, this sometimes harsh – but always cool – region produces food focused on simplicity and freshness, and very dependent on the time of year. The good news? It's nearly summer.

As days lengthen and warm up, things are actually able to grow. Late spring brings fresh herbs, rhubarb and asparagus to Scandinavian plates. Then menus begin to fill with sweet strawberries, new potatoes and fresh salads as well as boreal berries. Of course, the herring that was pickled the previous winter is still abundant, and is one of the key elements of the traditional midsummer feast (mid-June).

As the lives of many Scandinavians have to adapt to the seasons, so does the way they cook. So after summer's fruits comes autumn's bounty – hearty game, apples, wild mushrooms. In Sweden, crayfish season is August–September, when *kräftskiva* (crayfish parties) are held. In winter the chilly waters provide sustenance – expect cod and oysters.

Traditional dishes to look out for include open rye bread sandwiches with a range of toppings (*smørrebrød* in Denmark, *smörgås* in Sweden), *frikadeller* (fried minced meat dumplings) and *kogt torsk* (poached cod).

Try cooking Scandi yourself, or take advantage of Ryanair's new flight from Stansted to Skellefteå, in north-west Sweden, on the edge of Lapland. Just 3.5 hours from take-off, you can be eating gourmet grub at the Bryggargatan Restaurant, overlooking the Skellefteå River.

TOP TIP

When selecting your herring, ask the fishmonger how long it will keep (herring spoils quickly). Also, ask the fishmonger to gut, scale and de-bone it for you.

HOMEMADE WHITE HERRINGS

Serves 8-12

12 salted herring fillets
1 red onion, sliced
2 carrots, thinly sliced
2 dill sprigs, fronds picked off

For the brine

400ml water
240g caster sugar
2 bay leaves
2 tbsp whole peppercorns
1 tbsp coriander seeds
2 tbsp mustard seeds
10 whole cloves
400ml vinegar
15 allspice berries

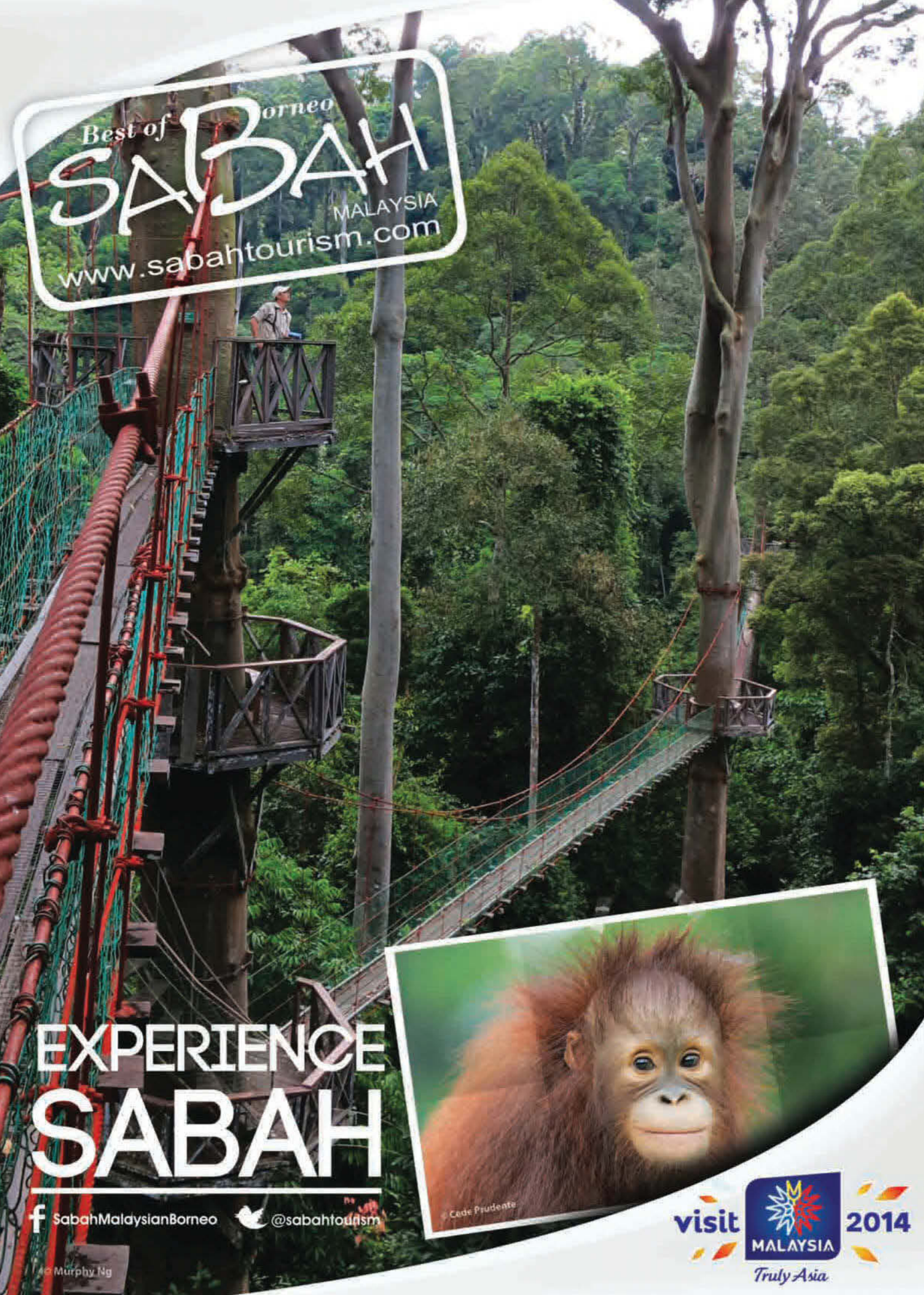
Method

1. Cover the salted herring fillets with cold water and then leave them to soak for six hours.
 2. Combine all the ingredients for the brine in a saucepan and bring to the boil, then reduce the heat and simmer for 30 minutes. Remove from the heat and set aside to cool.
 3. Drain the herring fillets and cut them into 3cm slices. Place them in a sterilised preserving jar with the sliced onion, carrots and dill fronds. Pour over the cold brine, seal tightly and leave in the fridge.
 4. After a week, fish out the pieces of herring and any parts of the brine as desired before serving. Try eating them on rye bread with sliced raw onion and dill.
- Stored in the refrigerator, the herrings will last for up to three months.

Recipe taken from *The Scandinavian Cookbook* by Trina Hahnemann (*Quadrille*, £13; quadrille.co.uk)



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7 JULIA BRADBURY: WHY TV NEEDS MORE TRAVEL

■ Five minutes with...



The presenter on footwear, flying, favourite countries and the lack of good travel telly

How did you get into television?

I didn't really have a plan. All I knew about school was that I wanted to leave as quickly as possible because I wasn't very academic. I left school at 16 and I got my first job in an advertising agency. Then things moved in a different direction as they do. I decided I wanted to be Joan Bakewell and that's when I started on the course to television.

You weren't involved with travel TV straight away, were you?

No, it was more about broadcasting at that stage. I started working for Janet Street-Porter. She had been asked to launch a cable station called LIVE TV with new faces, new producers and new talent. They had an interview process for presenters and I ended up with a job. Working for Janet is quite an experience; baptism of fire!

And then you became a presenter on *Wish You Were Here...*?

Yes, the ITV travel show. That was a dream come true. Travel reporting really is the most extraordinary way to see the world. You do it at breakneck speed and you can see two or three countries easily in a week. It takes its toll on the body though, it's not something you can do forever.

What's your preferred guidebook?

It's Rough Guides for me – for obvious reasons [Julia was a presenter on the *Rough Guide to...* TV show]. I have a bookshelf laden with Rough Guides to literally every country in the world.

What would you never travel without?

Flip flops. If I'm travelling to a hot destination, the first thing I do – even before we land – is put on my flip flops. I love the heat, so I love stepping off the plane in them. Plus they're great if you're stepping onto a dodgy bit of ocean or carpet.

'If I'm travelling to a hot destination, the first thing I do – even before we land – is put on my flip flops. I love the heat, so I love stepping off the plane in them'

Do you have a favourite city?

That is so hard, because I love cities. Um... Berlin. I love the contrasting architecture, I love the art galleries and I just think it has an incredible atmosphere.

What about a favourite country?

South Africa. I've known and loved it for 25 years, and have friends and family there. It's the place where I'd go back to in a heartbeat. I would love to live there.

Top tip for an emerging destination?

Nicaragua. It's incredible and still largely undiscovered – even by the Nicaraguan people. I think a lot of them – a large percentage certainly – have never seen the eastern side of the country.

What's your favourite travel TV show?

The problem is that there just aren't very many of them. When I was presenting *Wish You Were Here...* there were a lot; almost every terrestrial TV channel had one. But they just don't exist now in that form. Simon Reeve is quite rightly up there, but shows like his are few and far between – so I look forward to doing the next one!

TV presenter Julia Bradbury is currently working on new projects. For more from her see www.wanderlust.co.uk/146

8 UK EVENTS

NEW WORLD, OLD MAPS

Bath, Until 2 Nov
01225 460503,
www.americanmuseum.org
American Museum, BA2 7BD.
Entry £9 (museum and gardens).

Get a close-up look at one of the finest holdings of rare printed atlases: the American Museum's collection boasts more than 200 Renaissance maps.

DISCOVERING JORDAN

London, 1 May
020 7591 3100,
www.rgs.org/discoveringplaces
Royal Geographical Society, SW7 2AR. Tickets £10/£15 RGS-IBG members/non-members (includes wine and information pack). 7pm.

An expert panel will talk about Jordan, helping to inspire first-time travellers to get off the beaten track in the country. There will also be Q&A sessions and specialist exhibitors.

KESWICK MOUNTAIN FESTIVAL

Lake District, 15-18 May
01539 760175, www.keswickmountainfestival.co.uk
Crow Park, Keswick. Day passes £25 (Friday or Saturday), £15 (Sunday); weekend pass (Thurs-Sun) from £40.

Zorbing, mountain biking, climbing, slack-lining... just a few of the activities you can try at this year's festival. Also, there are high-profile speakers (including Alan Hinkes and Sir Ranulph Fiennes – to name a few!) and live music too.

CHESTER GLOBETROTTERS

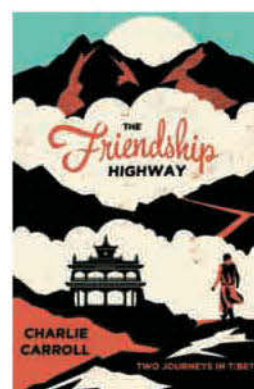
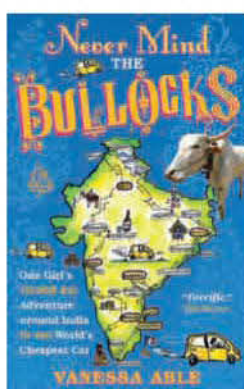
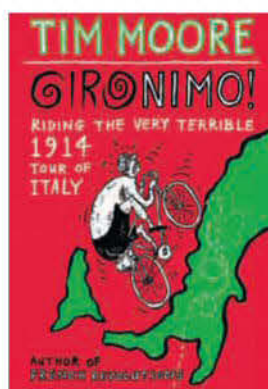
Chester, 17 May
01244 383392 / 629930,
www.globetrotters.co.uk
Grosvenor Museum, CH1 2DD.
Entry £3. 1pm.

Get tips on how to cross Istanbul in a VW campervan from speaker Kevin Jones. And hear about Chris Prior's Himalayan motorcycle ride.

POLE OF COLD: WHAT DOES WINTER MEAN TO YOU?

London, 19-23 May
www.rgs.org/poleofcold.com
Royal Geographical Society, SW7 2AR. Free. Open 10am-5pm.

Visit this exhibition about the 2013 Pole of Cold Expedition, which saw a team chase winter to Siberia, the coldest inhabited place on the planet, with icy adventures en route. The lowest temperature? -59°C...



9 Read this... Punny old (and new) worlds

The latest new travelogues and guides to hit the bookshelves

Big journeys, quirky transport, a punning title and a side order of self-discovery... this month's books may fit a few stereotypes but rise above them thanks to their intimate appreciations of their settings.

Tim Moore has form in the zany travelogue department but *Gironimo!* (Yellow Jersey, £15) sees him back in the cleats that won him fans in Tour-traverse *French Revolutions*. This time though he's sat on a mostly home-built wooden bike, all the better to realistically undertake the 1914 Giro d'Italia: the most gruelling bike race in history. Neither Italy, cycling or Moore's legs look particularly appetising by the time he rolls back into Milan, but you'll enjoy – and laugh – at the journey more than he does.

The Tata Nano, the world's cheapest car (or 'a toaster-on-wheels'), is Vanessa Able's chosen vehicle to tackle the planet's most terrifying roads: the crowds, chaos and cattle that flow in all directions on India's highways. As recounted in *Never Mind The Bullocks* (Nicholas Brealey, £11), Able's 10,000km roadtrip also trundles through the bits often left out of tourist itineraries – with a few romantic divergences – creating a rich snapshot of a colossal country.

Meanwhile *A Short Ride In The Jungle* (Summersdale, £10) follows Antonia Bolingbroke-Kent's solo jaunt over the 3,000km Ho Chi Minh Trail. As the mud of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia splatters her tiny pink moped, she doesn't find herself; rather, she unearths unexploded bombs, remote tribes and pre-Khmer ruins.

Charlie Carroll's *The Friendship Highway* (Summersdale, £10) is even less devoid of quirk, taking a blinker-free look at Tibet. His journey takes in Tibet's raw beauty but also the intense weight of fear that sits on the populace, with Carroll punctuating his story with that of Lobsang, the local he meets who's endured the Orwellian boot-stamps.

Following her own quietly gut-wrenching memoir, *A Glimpse Of Eternal Snows*, Dr Jane Wilson-Howarth – *Wanderlust's* resident GP for the past 20 years – returns to Nepal in more-fictional form for *Snowfed Waters* (FeedARead, £8). Sonia is the downcast singleton-turned-charity worker whose richly drawn adventures in the Himalaya force her to rethink her low self-esteem.

Frédéric Gros' *A Philosophy Of Walking* (Verso, £17) comes with a considered flick of Gauloise ash. Lauding the link between walking and thinking, it explores how many

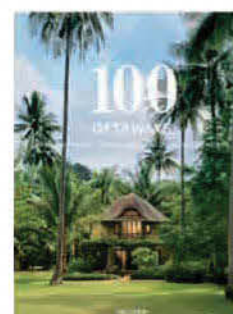
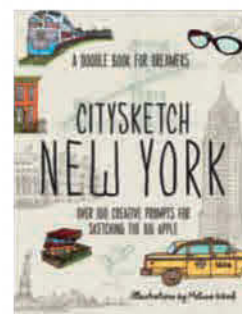
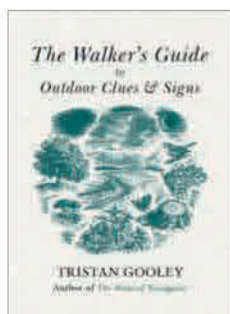
of the great philosophers were influenced by a fondness for strolling, and will send you to your boots with a sense of purpose.

While you're out and about, you can put Natural Navigator Tristan Gooley's advice into practice. *The Walker's Guide to Outdoor Clues & Signs* (Sceptre, £20) is an idiot-proof handbook that will enliven and enlighten your walks in equal measures.

Citysketch guidebooks (Race Point, £10 each) offer another way to engage with locations: draw them. The books – London, Paris and New York – walk you through the highlights, with every page setting you specific scribbling challenges ("draw people waiting outside a Jewish deli...") to complete the picture. Fun, creative, original.

No less imagination-firing is Daniel Smart's *Hidden Beaches* (Wild Things, £17), which successfully shines a spotlight on the much-overlooked British coast. In short, for UK dwellers, there's somewhere picturesque and very free somewhere near you.

Costlier is TASCHEN's huge two-volume *100 Getaways Around The World* – both in terms of the book's price (£35) and the retreats it features. But this luxurious coffee table tablet is ideal for inspiring that special hotel stay – or maybe bludgeoning intruders.





10 GUIDES MAKE A GOOD TRIP GREAT

■ Guide Awards Shortlist 2014

Attention *Wanderlust*-ers! We need your help to pick the best tour leaders and guides who have transformed your trip into the journey of a lifetime

They're the unsung heroes of the travel world, the ones who make your trip memorable. You guessed it; we're talking guides. And it's that time of year when we try to give something back to the people who lead us around the globe. We received over 2,200 nominations – a record – for the ninth *Wanderlust* World Guide Awards, and as usual, shortlisting just eight was a vast task.

But now we need your help: if you have ever travelled or worked with the guides shown here, please send us your comments via post, email or through our website (www.worldguideawards.co.uk) to help the judges decide. The top trio will be recognised and awarded bursaries – the Gold award winner receiving £5,000 – in a ceremony at the Royal Geographical Society on 21 October 2014.

Charlie Jaques

Where he guides:

France

Booked through:

Back-Roads Touring

(www.backroadstouring.com)



You can tell Charlie – aka CJ – has an adventurous spirit just by looking at his

passports: all 12 of them, full to brim with stamps from every continent. He's collected these through his 15 years of guiding, where he's pioneered routes through Russia, Mongolia and China. He returned to school to get to grips with his German, French and Spanish language skills, and even became a qualified skipper. You lauded his "willingness and flexibility" and vast knowledge of every destination. He now divides his time between guiding – focusing on France in particular – and training NGO personnel for hostile environments.

Bunyong Roern

Where he guides: Cambodia

Booked through: G Adventures

(www.gadventures.co.uk)



It only took Bunyong Roern – or 'Bun' – two years to make his mark at G Adventures,

where he's a CEO (chief experience officer). The company recognised him not just for his ability to "change travellers' lives forever", but also his passion to aid local communities worldwide through responsible travel. Before becoming a local guide around Angkor in 2003, Bun was a secondary school teacher in Cambodia's Siem Reap, but his desire to educate and inspire has found the ideal outlet: "Having Bun as my guide was like having: a historian, my father, a translator, a Buddhist monk, and a good friend travelling with me."

Daniele Binaghi

Where he guides: Latin America

Booked through:

Journey Latin America

(www.journeylatinamerica.co.uk)



Whether its enjoying an oven-baked *empanada* in the Andes, traipsing through the

tropical forests of Brazil, or delighting at people's reaction as they finally stumble upon onto the abundant temples and pyramids of the Yucatán – there are few people as passionate about Latin America as Daniele. Born in Italy but with a Latin heart, his most treasured memory of his extensive travels is seeing Machu Picchu beneath a rainbow-filled sky, a moment he loves sharing with his charges – along with an energy boosting chocolate bar. In turn, they've been quick to support him, saying he is always "on sparkling form, full of energy and happy to talk about anything".

Suryaveer Singh Chundawat

Where he guides: India

Booked through: Wild Frontiers

(www.wildfrontierstravel.com)



Suryaveer – or 'Surya' as his many supporters know him – loves to share his remarkable

Rajasthani family history (he's a descendent of one of the state's most important feudal barons) and the rich, hospitable culture of India with whomever he can. In a nutshell: guiding is his dream job, and it shows: "He combines information with a deep spiritual understanding of the culture," you said, commending his passion and intelligence. He introduces travellers to India's many different sides, from its folklore, mysticism and spirituality to romance and luxury. You can even visit his home, which he has transformed into a heritage hotel – now that's dedication.

Efrain Valles

Where he guides: Peru

Booked through:

Amazonas Explorer

(www.amazonas-explorer.com)



You cannot help but love 'Effie'. Since graduating from Cusco's Tupac Amaru University, he has

spent the last 12 years leading treks across Peru, projecting his infectious energy and enthusiasm onto every group he takes on, as well as sharing his boundless knowledge of the country's history, culture and nature. Amid guiding, looking after his family and charity marathon training (he did London 2012 dressed as a *chaski* (Incan messenger), Effie also volunteers with the charity Chicuchas Wasi, helping girls in extreme poverty. You described him as a "great ambassador for Peru who wants nothing for himself" and someone who communicates through "humour, smiles and hugs".

Lewis Mangaba

Where he guides: Tanzania

Booked through: Asilia Africa

(www.asiliaafrica.com)



"His knowledge and passion for the land, the animals, the trees, and the history are

authentic and heartfelt." This is just one of the many testimonials we've had about Lewis Mangaba. Born in Zimbabwe, he has been guiding ardently across Africa for over 16 years: tracking big game on walking safaris, canoeing past hippos and swimming elephants, and teaching travellers to interpret tracks. Now, as Head Guide for Oliver's Camp in Tarangire, Tanzania, he's literally become the guide's guide – sharing his unwavering enthusiasm and knowledge with his fellow guides, training them in the ways of African people, wildlife and conservation.

Dheeraj 'Monty' Bhatt

Where he guides: India

Booked through: Intrepid/Exodus

(www.intrepidtravel.com / www.exodus.co.uk)



Having been 'Highly Commended' several times in previous years, could third time

be the charm for Monty? Born in a tiny village in Rajasthan, Dheeraj 'Monty' Bhatt grew up in Bundi where he began leading tours aged just 16. Now a well-respected, passionate guide, his journeys into the rural parts of Rajasthan have been described as "trips of a lifetime" with supporters praising his instinct to go the extra mile to make their trip better. "He treated us like a personal guest in his country and even invited us to his apartment in Jaipur for dinner," said one traveller.

Cathy Harlow

Where she guides: Iceland

Booked through:

Discover the World

(www.discover-the-world.co.uk)



Gutting herring, stacking salt cod and packing frozen fillets was Cathy Harlow's ticket into

Iceland. She was so passionate about the quirky country growing up that she worked a stint in a fish factory to learn more about its culture – before becoming a qualified guide in 1987. Since then this "professional and enthusiastic" guide has accompanied around 200 groups on hiking, trekking, natural history, whalewatching and northern lights tours around Iceland, as well as nature and walking trips in the Azores, Bahamas, Florida, Norway, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Madagascar.



COMMENDED GUIDES

Many congratulations to the following fantastic guides who also deserve a special mention:

Gill Girard,
freelance, Guernsey
Chhon Chhea Yut,
Angkor Walkers, Cambodia
Simon Segali,
Vered Hasharon, Israel
Ronald Collado,
Creas, Peru
Mehmet Gungor,
Walking Mehmet, Turkey
Dingo Walsh,
G Adventures, Australia
Mayer Magdy,
G Adventures, Egypt

Have you travelled with one of these extraordinary shortlisted guides?

If you have a tale to tell or praise for one of our eight incredible tour leaders, please drop us a line. Tell us what you love about their work and why you think they deserve this coveted industry accolade – the only one of its kind.

Send your comments by:

POST: Wanderlust World Guide Awards [name of guide],
1 Leworth Place, Mellor Walk,
Windsor SL4 1EB

EMAIL:

topguide@wanderlust.co.uk

ONLINE: Post your comments online at
www.worldguideawards.co.uk
The deadline for testimonials is
23 May 2014.

Instant Expert

KNOW YOUR... RHINOS

Horny issue
Africa's black rhino population is under threat



11

As 1 May is Save The Rhino Day we focus on these creatures, which have roamed the earth for millennia – but now face extinction

You can still spot rhinoceroses across parts of Africa and Asia, but there's no denying that numbers of these prehistoric-looking herbivores are dwindling. While rhinos used to roam freely about the plains and tropical forests of India, Nepal, Indonesia and other parts of Asia as well as east and southern Africa, now few survive outside national reserves.

What are the five species?

They are: white, black, greater one-horned, Sumatran and Javan.

Black and white rhinos are both found in Africa and, despite their names, both are grey. They have a few distinguishing features though: whites are bigger – an adult white can weight up to 3,000kg, while adult blacks are more commonly 900-1,300kg. Also, if the rhino you're tracking has a short head, hooked upper lip and is chomping on woody plants,

it's a black; if its head is longer, with a square mouth, and it's grazing on grass, it's a white.

Nepal and India are home to the one-horned rhino – of which there are less than 3,000. Rarer still are the Sumatran (less than 100) and Javan (40) species; the former live in Sumatra and Malaysian Borneo, the latter in Java's Ujung Kulon National Park.

Where's best to see them?

One of the easiest options is South Africa; Kruger National Park has a healthy population of whites and blacks. Tiny Swaziland packs in a good number, too – see them on game drives or walking safaris in Mkhaya or Hlane Royal national parks. Kenya's Ol Pejeta Conservancy is a good place to spot black and (less likely) white rhino, while black rhino numbers have been increasing in Namibia.

Beyond Africa, you're virtually guaranteed a sighting of a one-horned rhino in India's

Kaziranga NP, while numbers have also been on the up in Chitwan NP in Nepal.

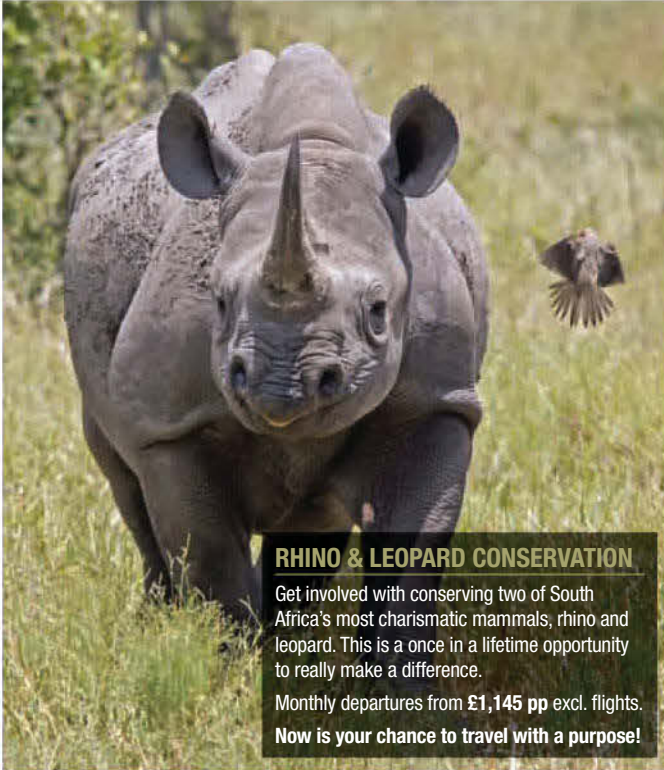
Why are they suffering?

Poaching and the illegal horn trade are undermining conservation efforts. In January the South African government reported that 1,004 rhinos were slaughtered in 2013, up from 668 in 2012. Dr Jo Shaw from WWF South Africa says "South Africa's rhinos are up against the wall, facing a genuine crisis."

How can I help?

You could make a donation to, or fundraise for, a charity such as Save the Rhino. Also, by visiting rhinos in a sensitive manner, you can help ensure they're worth more alive.

On 1 May, why not attend Rhino Mayday 2014 to find out more about the mammal from the experts (University College London; 10am-5pm; £15pp; 020 7357 7474, www.savetherhino.org).



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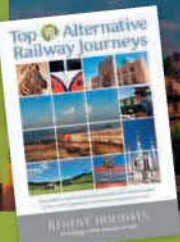
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Turkey to Iran is just one of the unique train tours featured in our Top 10 Alternative Railway Journeys guide. Take the track less travelled on the **Tsar's Gold Trans-Siberian** or discover the ancient towns of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan on the **Silk Road Private Train**.

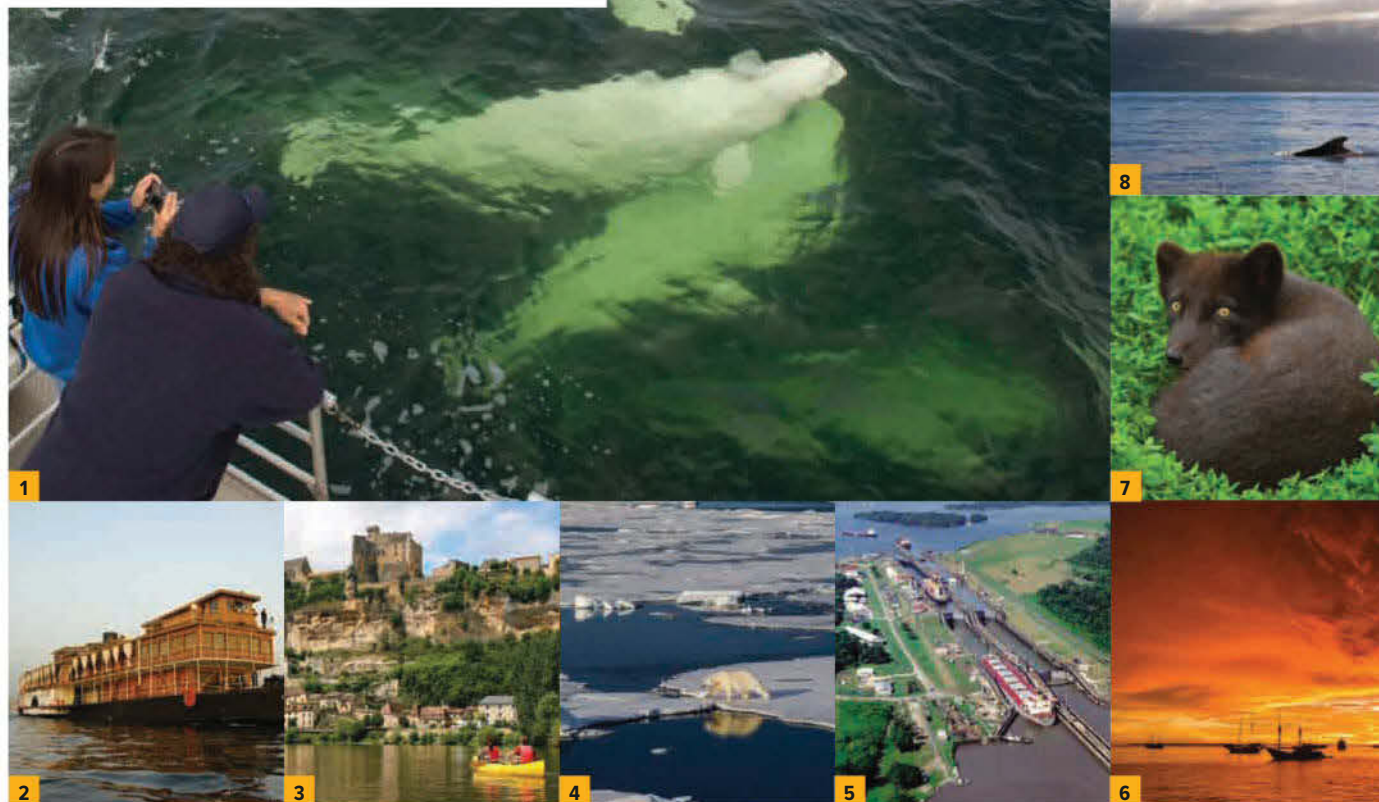


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ABTA

12 JUST ADD WATER

Be Inspired



Taking a trip on the water – be it river voyage, sea journey or coastal kayak – opens up a whole new world. It gives you a different perspective on our planet, and reveals the abundant treasures of our seas, streams and oceans not accessible by land. From immense icebergs, to mighty whales, thousand-year-old corals and the communities that cling to life-giving shores, here are nine watery trips to kick-start your life aquatic...

PICKY TRAVELLER

Know when you want to travel but don't know where? Got an activity you long to try but not sure how? Try Wanderlust's Trip Finder: mytripfinder.co.uk

1. Canada Befriend a whale pod

There's nothing quite like spotting the snow-white flash of a pod of beluga whales. Each summer, thousands of these charismatic cetaceans return to Manitoba's waters; on **Discover the World's Belugas of Hudson Bay** trip – which can include whale-watching by Zodiac boat, kayak and even snorkel – you'll get so close to these canaries of the sea that you can hear their quirky clicks and whistles.

Who: Discover the World (01737 214 291, discover-the-world.co.uk)

When: Jul-Aug

How long: 5 nights

How much: From £1,518 (excl flights)

2. Egypt Propel yourself back in time

Built in 1885, and boasting wall-mounted phones, brass bedsteads and its original pistons and paddle wheels, the *Steam Ship Sudan* – offered by **Audley** – is one of the most unique vessels cruising the Nile. Hop aboard (as Agatha Christie once did) to float through Ancient Egypt in 19th-century style. Highlights will include stopping off at Luxor's temples and sitting on deck with a cocktail, watching riverside life glide by.

Who: Audley Travel (01993 838 400, audleytravel.com)

When: Year round

How long: 7 days

How much: From £2,415 (incl flights)

3. France

Combine canoes, cliffs and culture

Headwater's *Canoeing on the Dordogne* trip wends from hotel to hotel via one of France's most celebrated rivers. Calm and wide, this southwestern waterway is ideal for canoeing beginners and those keen to explore postcard-perfect hillside villages, troglodyte cave dwellings and graceful châteaux.

Who: Headwater (0845 527 7075, www.headwater.com)

When: 2 Jun-24 Sept 2014

How long: 8 nights

How much: From £1,477 (incl flights)

4. Svalbard

Sail Arctic waters

Exodus's *Spitsbergen in Depth – Photographic Special* trip heads to the edges of this far-flung Norwegian archipelago, under the midnight sun. Led by pro-snapper Paul Goldstein and wildlife expert Ian Stirling, you'll traverse the seas in an expedition vessel in search of polar bear, Arctic fox, walrus and seabirds.

Who: Exodus (0845 287 3647, www.exodus.co.uk)

When: 13-25 Jun 2014

How long: 13 nights

How much: From £3,839 (excl flights)

5. Panama

Discover an engineering marvel

A revamped Panama Canal marks its 100th birthday this year with new locks, wider lanes and bigger ports. **Journey Latin America's** *Hats Off To Panama* trip includes a full-day ocean-to-ocean transit through the canal as well as the chance to ride the vintage Panama Canal Railroad. The August departure coincides with the centenary festivities.

Who: Journey Latin America (020 8622 8444, journeylatinamerica.co.uk)

When: 15 Jun, 13 Jul, 10 Aug, 14 Dec 2014

How long: 8 days

How much: From £2,399 (incl flights)

6. Indonesia

Cruise coral-rich seas

About 70% of the planet's coral species are found in the Raja Ampat archipelago. See some of them on **Undiscovered Destinations'** *West Papua Voyage of*

Discovery which ventures through mysterious caverns, around jungle-clad Batanta island and into Mayalibit Bay aboard a wooden Buginese schooner.

Who: Undiscovered Destinations (0191 296 2674, undiscovered-destinations.com)

When: 5 & 14 Nov 2014

How long: 12 days

How much: £3,970 (excl flights)

7. Russia

Float through the far east

Exploring remote Kamchatka's Commander Islands, **Naturetrek's** *Russia's Ring of Fire* trip promises close encounters with sea otter, fishing owl, Arctic fox, brown bear and majestic orca as well as visits to thermal springs, flower-filled meadows and coastal bays. A really alternative Russian adventure.

Who: Naturetrek (01962 733051, www.naturetrek.co.uk)

When: 23 Jun 2014

How long: 15 days

How much: From £6,995 (incl flights)

8. Azores

Study the smartest cetaceans

Summer is sperm whale season in the Azores and **Wildlife Worldwide's** *Sperm Whales & Bottlenose Dolphins* tour gives you the chance to help researchers gather information on these big-brained cetaceans. You can study dolphins and dive with blue sharks too.

Who: Wildlife Worldwide (0845 130 6982, wildlifeworldwide.com)

When: Jun-Sept 2014

How long: 6 days

How much: From £1,340 (incl flights)

9. Burma (Myanmar)

Glide down the Chindwin River

Wild Frontiers' Burmese River Expedition sails along the 1,210km Chindwin River, through some of Burma's remotest landscapes. Meet riverside communities, pass untamed jungles, moor at Bagan's pagodas, discover the old elephant camp at Mawlaik and delve into the history of Yangon and Mandalay.

Who: Wild Frontiers (020 7736 3968, wildfrontierstravel.com)

When: 9 Nov 2014

How long: 15 days

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THE BAY NEXT DOOR

WORDS NICK BOULOS

Halong Bay is one of the New Wonders of the World and tourists flock to sail its karst-dotted waters. However, a few miles away there's another bay – just as beautiful but minus the crowds...









The islands were sprinkled across the bay like roughly cut diamonds on a jeweller's counter. Dozens lay immediately ahead, each pure and perfect and wild, with exotic foliage clinging to vertical walls that soared skywards from the water. Beyond, many hundreds more: they sat on the hazy horizon like ghost ships. I wondered which was to be mine.

The boat's engine spluttered and fell silent. Momentum propelled us onto the shore, the fine grains of Thien Canh Son's beach scratching against the timber underbelly. "What does the name mean?" I asked my guide, Tony. "It's Vietnamese for Paradise Island," he replied. Ah, yes. Paradise Island would do nicely.

Aside from a washed-up starfish, two excitable dogs and a yawning caretaker, Thien Canh Son was deserted. It was, for an hour or two at least, my own private island. But I hadn't stumbled across some secret nirvana, far out at sea. No, just to the west crowded boats were ferrying tourists around one of the world's most famous natural wonders. Yet here, a few short miles away, there wasn't a soul to be seen.

New kid in the bay

Halong Bay hogs the limelight. This sweep of north-east Vietnam's Gulf of Tonkin, scattered with 1,600 craggy limestone karsts, is on many a traveller's bucket list. Yet just next door, Bai Tu Long Bay offers the same jaw-dropping scenery but sees only a fraction of the visitors. ►

Star spotting
(clockwise from this)
A starfish on one of the countless deserted islands in Bai Tu Long; boats wait for tourists visiting the Vung Vieng floating village; Vietnamese flag; daily life in Halong Bay; (previous page) Bai Tu Long



Safe, sound & serene...

(clockwise from this)

The quiet fishing village of Vung Vieng in Bai Tu Long is overlooked – and protected – by remarkable scenery; floating shop, Halong Bay; a Bai Tu Long local rows his boat; a natural arch gives Vung Vieng a window to the sea



‘The voyage was slow and leisurely, mostly spent identifying shapes in the rugged isles. Row upon row of islands consumed the scene, merging into one mangled land mass and creating distant optical illusions’

◀ At any given time, more than 500 boats are cruising the waters of Halong Bay, revealing its ethereal beauty to more than 8,000 tourists. According to Tony, Bai Tu Long receives around 1% of that traffic. “Everyone goes to Halong Bay,” he said. “It’s a special place but very busy and commercial now. When I was a boy, my friends and I would climb the cliffs there. It was only us and the fishermen. Then, suddenly, people started coming.”

The wider world cottoned on in 1994 when Halong (and parts of Bai Tu Long) was named a UNESCO World Heritage site. Today it’s one of Asia’s most popular – and spectacular – sites, with miles of beaches and traditional fishing communities. However, much of its early charm has been eroded.

I sailed around Halong Bay some years ago, instantly captivated by its beauty. Sadly, though, that wasn’t my only memory. I recall docking at an island, my boat jostling for space at the lopsided pier, and joining a long line that shuffled into a cave where a despondent guide pointed out phallic rocks with a fading laser. That evening I’d stood on deck watching the sun set the sea and sky ablaze when a small dinghy interrupted the scene and its

skipper – the Vietnamese Del Boy – proceeded to tout his entire inventory. It was like watching the shopping channel live at sea. He remained until I begrudgingly handed over some dong. I wasn’t buying biscuits but a precious few minutes without the hard sell. Only then did he leave me to my sunset.

This time promised to be different.

Here be dragons

The three-hour drive from Hanoi to Halong City took us from the capital’s choked streets and through rural scenes of farmers and water buffalos, waterlogged paddy fields and tiny cemeteries. An endless stream of stalls selling steaming *pho* (noodle soup) flashed by. Cars, trucks and motorbikes laden with pigs played games of *gà* (chicken), speeding towards oncoming traffic before abruptly swerving to safety with a long blast of the horn.

As the cranes and car showrooms of Halong City materialised, so too did the first of many limestone karsts, rising like bulbous tree-cloaked humps from the water. The diesel-scented harbour was chaotic, a mix of lavish yachts, cargo containers ►





Floating boaters
A craft takes
visitors to the
floating village
of Vung Vieng



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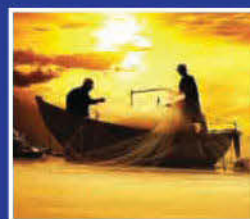
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Anchored accommodation
One of the distinctive houses at the Vung Vieng floating village



‘Setting sail aboard the *Princess*, it was hard not to feel just a little smug as we journeyed in the opposite direction to almost every other vessel’

◀ and wooden fishing boats. Somewhere among them was my home for the next two nights: a teak Chinese-style junk boat modelled on those that once traded silk, cotton and ceramics here in centuries gone by.

Setting sail aboard the *Princess*, it was hard not to feel just a little smug as we journeyed in the opposite direction to almost every other vessel. At the helm was our laidback and laconic skipper, Nguyen Hoang Hiep, who guided us through the labyrinthine waterways using his feet to steer the boat.

The three-hour voyage was slow and leisurely, mostly spent

identifying shapes in the rugged isles: the hunched silhouette of a gorilla, the statues of Easter Island, the profile of Abraham Lincoln. Row upon row of islands consumed the entire scene, merging into one mangled land mass and creating distant optical illusions.

Experts believe the spectacle is a result of more than 500 million years of geological changes, but the Vietnamese have another theory. According to legend, Halong Bay was created by a dragon sent to earth to protect the country from early sea invaders. The beast landed and sprayed pearls from its mouth that later formed these rugged towers. Bai Tu Long (‘Bay of Baby Dragons’) is where the kids hung out.

But, why, I wondered did so few people venture here despite the many obvious pleasures? “Halong is closer to the harbour, and the islands there are taller and less spread out. Plus the government has spent millions developing the infrastructure to cater for mass tourism,” explained Tony. “Bai Tu Long is what Halong was like before. It reminds me of my childhood, those early days spent climbing and swimming.”

We moored for the night at Cong Do, a spot ringed by cliffs more than 100m high. Like skyscrapers designed by Mother Nature, they were riddled with deep gashes, smeared markings and other beautiful imperfections. Dusk was in a hurry, upon us and gone in the blink of an eye. As the stars set in, the only illumination came from three other boats that cast rippling columns of light across the bay. ▶

VIETNAM

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TAKE AN EVENING VESPA TOUR OF SAIGON

CATE: Exploring Saigon on the back of a Vespa after dark cannot be beaten. Visiting cafés and sampling delicious food sat amongst the city's friendly locals, you can discover a lifestyle impossible to see on the normal tourist trail. The trip really gives you a taste of life as a Saigon resident, with a snapshot of how food, music and socialising make up the fabric of the city.



MEET THE HILLTRIBES IN MŨ CANG CHÀI

TOM: Most people take a train into the far north of Vietnam, but the road less travelled gives you the opportunity to take in the dramatic scenery and meet the hilltribes that call it home.

Luscious green rice terraces dominate the landscape as you meander along the mountain sides on this scenic drive. Stopping off en route to meet the H'mong people (one of several hilltribes in Mù Cang Chải) is a really humbling experience – they are just as intrigued to meet you as you are them.



FISHING WITH THE LOCALS IN HOI AN

ALEX: The Hoi An Fisherman Experience supports the local community and combines fun, adventure and history in one. Heading out in a traditional boat to fish the local waters, you learn about the impact of the Vietnam War on this

area and navigate channels between coconut water palms. The fishermen's enthusiasm is infectious, and it is a great way to see the local community up close.



A STREET FOOD TOUR WITH THE EXPERTS

JACQUI: My favourite way to explore Hanoi is to enjoy a street food tour with local food bloggers Vang or Mark. Wander through the narrow alleyways of the atmospheric Old Quarter and bustling markets, sampling many

Vietnamese dishes en route. Exploring on foot, you get to absorb the sights and smells of the city and finish by enjoying a steaming bowl of pho soup with the locals – the best way to start the day!

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◀ The people of the sea

By morning, the other boats had gone. We bobbed alone on the milky green waters as fog swirled at the peaks. Over a breakfast of steamed rice and freshly caught squid, Tony spoke of secret lagoons deep within the islands, reached via narrow channels accessible only by kayak. My eyes widened. “Sadly,” he said, checking charts and forecasts, “the tide is too low to reach them.” Instead we sailed to Vung Vieng, the largest fishing village within Bai Tu Long.

Hidden from view as we approached, the community of 300 sits in sheltered waters almost completely surrounded by cliffs. A sharp port turn revealed clusters of tiny turquoise huts tied together and floating on large blue barrels. The breeze waltzed through the drying laundry. Dogs dozed in rowboats filled with fishing nets.

Most of the 71 families were nowhere to be seen, either tucked away indoors or out chasing grouper and sea bass. But Vung Vieng isn't always such a subdued place. The full moon festivals are, by all accounts, vivacious while the heated dragonboat races attract competitors from across the bay.

The school run was in full swing. A young girl travelled from house to house collecting her pals, deftly rotating the long oars of her boat with the soles of her feet. With lessons about to start, she moored up outside the one-classroom school and vanished inside.

Nearby, and enjoying a rare day off with his fishermen friends, Vu Van Hong was sipping green tea from a cup barely bigger than a thimble. His face creased when he laughed and long strands of hair dangled from his chin.

“I was born on the water and have fished all my life,” he said, refilling my cup. “I’m proud of Bai Tu Long. It is very special and I see its beauty every day. More people should come here.”

But Bai Tu Long isn't an entirely tourist-free zone any more. Signs of growing popularity were plain to see in Vung Vieng.

There was a dusty museum, a small stand selling local art and, most tellingly, a shiny gift shop filled with expensive pearl jewellery produced by the sprawling oyster farm on the outskirts of the village.

It's a sign of locals finding new means of income, as fishing is not the fruitful industry it once was. The community has always combined its efforts for the greater good; households would each bring their hauls to the chief's house where it was collected and taken to the markets on the mainland. But with seafood stocks dwindling due to bigger vessels and modern methods, fishing here is harder than ever.

The strategic location of Vung Vieng has ensured its survival since the early 19th century when it started as a humble anchorage for passing junk boats seeking shelter from the unforgiving winds. Slowly but surely, homes were built and a community took shape. Many families, however, choose to live at sea on tiny fishing boats of wood and bamboo but made the move to more permanent dwellings around 20 years ago.

More importantly, the guardian rocks that wrap a protective arm around this isolated enclave have shielded it from unimaginable horror.

“Typhoon Haiyan was scary,” recalled fisherman Vu. “The wind was strong and noisy, the rain heavier than I’ve ever seen it. We put the children to bed and stayed up all night in case others needed help but we knew our islands would keep us safe.”

The village now faces a threat of a different kind with talk of the government relocating families to preserve the integrity of the bay. Concern is running high. “My family have fished here for centuries. I can't imagine living on the mainland,” added Vu, mournfully.

After a final refill I said goodbye to my new friend, leaving him to his tea and quietly wondering how many more cups he will sip in this idyllic spot. ►

Water babies
Children on their way
to school at the Vung
Vieng floating village





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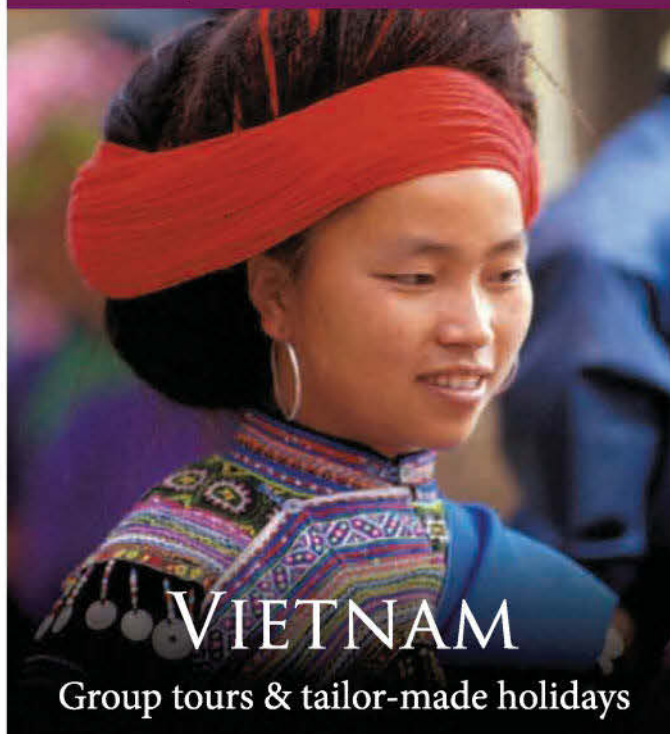


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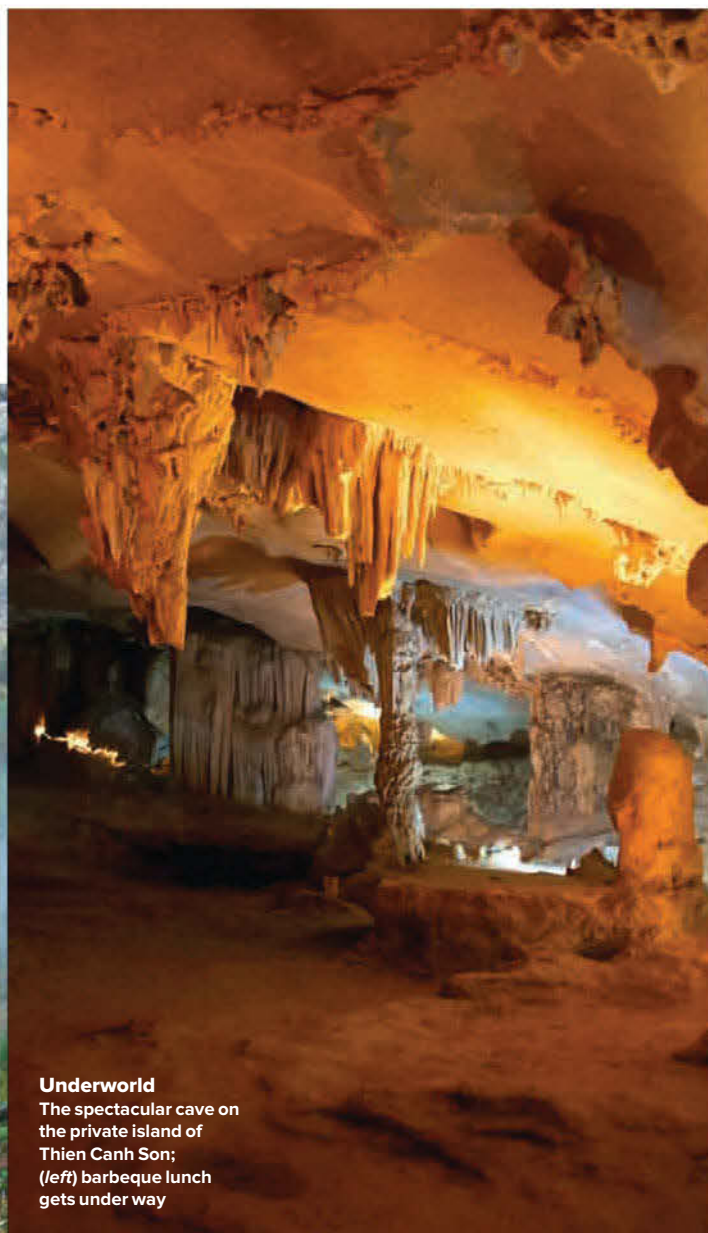
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AITO ABTA & ATOL

‘The interior of the cave, a cathedral of stalactites oozing from the ceiling like melting candle wax, was silent and warm’



Underworld
The spectacular cave on the private island of Thien Canh Son; (left) barbeque lunch gets under way

◀ Playing Crusoe

And so, to Thien Canh Son. On the beach, I scrambled over algae-covered boulders and paddled in the sea, all the while indulging in an inner Crusoe fantasy. Robinson, though, didn't have a private chef firing up a barbecue to make his lunch.

Darkening clouds ended our plans to eat on the beach so, instead, we dined in the vast chambers of the island's cave. The interior, a cathedral of stalactites oozing from the ceiling like melting candle wax, was silent and warm. Threads of daylight seeped through deep cracks. As the prawns sizzled on the grill I explored the cave, eventually emerging onto a high vantage point overlooking the greying seascape below. Drained of light, the sheer limestone pillars – usually verdant with unruly vines and overgrown Halong palms – had been demoted to monochrome. But even in such mist there was great majesty.

The sky wept. Drizzle drifted downwards and the circling sea hawks sought refuge in the rocks. Visibility remained poor well into the evening but our trusted Captain wasn't particularly fazed. "Sailing here is easy," he laughed, twirling the ship's wheel with a flick of the ankle.

Still, these waters are to be respected. Many early trading vessels ran aground here, striking rocks in the shallow waters.

Treasure hunters seeking ancient ceramics have pillaged these wrecks; some got more than they bargained for, discovering unexploded bombs dropped by American planes during the Vietnam War. The thought of sailing over shipwrecks and ordnance was an uneasy one but the small Buddhist shrine tucked in the corner beside the skipper was reassuring.

Halong City beckoned early the following morning. At first the only boat sailing alongside us was a tiny launch belonging to an old lady in a pointy straw hat; she sat hunched, diligently feeding long fishing lines into the water, the frayed nets unravelling through her clenched palm like a magician's hankie.

However, more and more boats appeared as we neared the harbour until, suddenly, it seemed we were part of some river pageant. As the high-rises began to form on the shore, so too did tiny figures, eagerly awaiting the starts of their Halong adventures. Many, I imagined, were destined for the gargantuan cruise liner moored nearby. Poised and pointing west, there were no prizes for guessing to which of the two bays it was heading. 📍

Nick Boulous is a multi-award-winning travel writer, most recently Consumer Travel Writer of the Year at the British Travel Press Awards



Vietnam Footnotes

VITAL STATISTICS

Capital: Hanoi
Population: 92.5 million
Languages: Vietnamese; some English
Time: GMT+7
Visas: Required by UK nationals and can be obtained in advance from the Vietnamese embassy (vietnambassay.org.uk; £54). To get one on arrival, travellers need a visa authorisation letter in advance. Some airlines will deny boarding without one and most tour operators can assist with this.
Money: Vietnamese dong (VND), currently around VND35,000 to the UK£. US dollars are widely accepted. ATMs are available in larger towns.

When to go

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec

■ **Cold** in the north; largely **dry** and **warm** in the south
 ■ **Best time to visit Halong Bay;** beginning of the wet season in the south
 ■ **Hot, humid and wet;** risk of typhoons in the north

Health & safety

No specific vaccinations are required. There's a risk of malaria and dengue fever in some areas, including the south and the Mekong Delta.

Vietnam is largely safe but petty crime can be a problem. Take care when travelling by, and crossing, roads – accidents are common.

Further reading & information

Vietnam (Lonely Planet, 2012)
Vietnam (Rough Guide, 2012)
www.vietnamtourism.com

More online

Visit www.wanderlust.co.uk/146 for links to more content:

ARCHIVE ARTICLES

- ◆ First 24hrs: Hanoi – issue 130
- ◆ Hoi An: the best city on earth – issue 135
- ◆ 5 Alternative things to do in Halong Bay – online

PLANNING GUIDES

- ◆ Vietnam travel guide

THE TRIP

The author travelled with **Inside Vietnam Tours** (0117 244 3370, www.insidevietnamtours.com), which offers tailor-made trips throughout Vietnam.

A nine-night *Best of Vietnam* itinerary, including an overnight cruise on Halong Bay, costs from £940pp. An 11-night trip including Hanoi, Hoi An, Hue, Ho Chi Minh City and three nights on a private junk boat in Bai Tu Long Bay costs from £1,455pp. Prices cover accommodation, guided transfers and excursions, domestic flights and some meals but exclude international flights.



Getting there

Vietnam Airlines (020 3263 2062, www.vietnamairlines.com) flies direct from Gatwick to Hanoi twice weekly. Other carriers offer more regular but in-direct links. The author flew with **Singapore Airlines** (020 8961 6993, www.singaporeair.com), which flies daily to Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City from Heathrow via Singapore. Fares start from £575 to Hanoi, £535 to Ho Chi Minh City.



Getting around

Travel in Vietnam is easy. **Vietnam Railways** (www.vr.com.vn – not in English) runs overnight sleeper trains; tickets can be

booked at local stations or via agencies in Vietnam and the UK. Reservations are essential on overnight services.

Halong Bay is a three- to four-hour drive from Hanoi. Transfers are often included in cruise packages but **local buses** also serve the route, leaving from the capital's Luong Yen bus station.

HALONG AND BAI TU LONG BAY HIGHLIGHTS

1 Vung Vieng Circled by towering cliffs, this sleepy fishing village of just 300 people offers an insight into local life on the bay.

2 Cat Ba National Park (pictured) Hike through dense jungle, home to langur monkeys and sea hawks, on Halong's largest island.

3 Bai Tu Long National Park Explore the coves and forests of this rarely visited protected wilderness and then

kick back and relax on Minh Chau, which has a 2km stretch of perfect beachfront.

4 Cong Do island Kayak in the shadows of soaring hills and through secret channels to hidden lagoons.

5 Dao Titop Climb to the summit of this island for the unrivalled panoramic views of Halong Bay.

6 Tra Ban Island Home to rice fields and some of Bai Tu Long's finest karst scenery, this wild island's best seen by bike.



Vietnam has a good network of **cheap domestic flights**.



Accommodation

There are plenty of excellent, good-value hotels in Vietnam. Good choices include **Maison d'Orient** (maison-orient.com) in Hanoi and the Alcove Library Hotel (alcovehotel.com.vn) in Ho Chi Minh City.

Options are a little more limited once you get to Halong City – **most visitors stay on boats** – but the **BMC Thang Long Hotel** (bmcthanglonghotel.com) is recommended.



Cost of travel

Vietnam still offers **excellent value for money** for travellers. Expect to pay VND30,000–65,000 (85p–£1.70) for a beer and around VND7,000 (20p) for a bottle of water.

Anyone looking to enjoy a decent meal out will be delighted to know they can cost as little as VND30,000 (85p).



Food & drink

Each region of Vietnam has its own cuisine. In the north food is **influenced by nearby China** with lots of fried or barbecued sliced meats served with vermicelli noodles. Expect lots of **fish and fresh seafood** in Halong Bay. The national dish is **pho**, a clear noodle soup typically served with chicken (*ga*) or beef (*bo*) and a side plate of chillies and fresh herbs. It's commonly eaten for breakfast or lunch.





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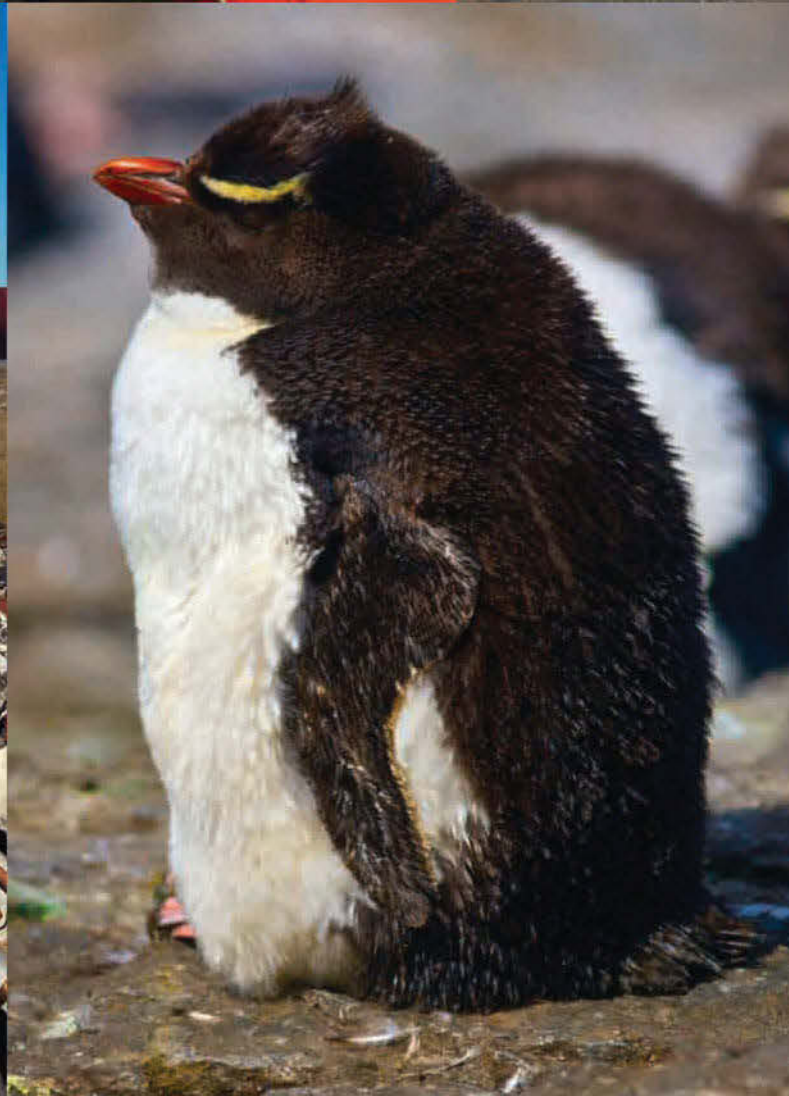
Falkland Islands

A group of nine penguins, likely albatrosses, are standing in a line on a weathered wooden pier. The pier is made of dark, wet wooden planks. In the background, the calm sea stretches to the horizon under a dramatic, cloudy sky with a warm, orange glow from the setting or rising sun. A single wooden post stands on the right side of the pier.

LIVING ON THE EDGE

Island survival doesn't come much tougher than on the Falklands archipelago, the place to meet a wealth of wonderful wildlife and the equally resilient human residents

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHS **MARK STRATTON**





Over views
(clockwise from this)
East Falklands from
a window seat;
southern rockhopper
penguins, Bleaker
Island; the wreckage of
a Chinook chopper;
southern elephant
seals, Sea Lion Island;
home comforts, Stanley;
(previous) rock shags

By the wreckage of an Argentinean Chinook, my guide Patrick Watts MBE, passed me a black-and-white photograph. Taken in 1982, it showed a droopily droopy moustachioed Watts in Stanley radio station – where he was a DJ at the time – being handed a sheet of announcements by an Argentine officer with a holstered firearm.

“I was on air when Argentina invaded the Falklands,” he said. “I was ordered to announce things like curfews and blackouts. I wasn’t spreading their propaganda; I had to warn islanders how to stay safe.” Recordings of his live broadcast capture him saying: “I’m not going to communicate your information with a gun at my back.” He’s too modest to mention such coolness himself.

Life on this 778-island archipelago on the other side of the world has moved on since the conflict. But the natural elements remain unforgiving. Seas are towering. The westerly winds can knock you sideways. Few flights land, compounding the geographic isolation. And Argentina fervently presses her claim to Las Malvinas.

But with fisheries wealth and the expectation of oil, the Falkland Islands’ economy is booming. So too is Falklanders’ confidence in their place in the world since 2013’s referendum on whether to remain a UK Overseas Territory was a 99.8% YES.

“We’re resolute, tenacious, proud to be staunchly British, and determined to retain our right to self-determination,” said Watts. Such fortitude characterises today’s Falklanders. I hoped to experience how their microcosmic society thrives and to learn how the events of 1982 shaped them in a setting of otherworldly remoteness.

Part of the Falklands’ new wealth comes from wildlife tourism, an experience that is, I was to discover, every bit as intimate as visiting the Galápagos. Without overly anthropomorphising, there are shared qualities between man and beast here (even if a million penguins don’t give a flying fish whether the Union Jack flutters or not). From the thick skin of the elephant seals to the courage of the rockhopper penguins – which jump into seas full of killer whales – endurance rules the waves.

As the international flight from Chile runs just once a week, that’s how long I stayed. This gave me time to venture from the main islands of East Falkland (home to Stanley) and West Falkland to the archipelago’s extremities: tiny islets where tenacious locals eke a living from tourism. The government-run light aircraft service (or FIGAS) connects these islands. At 6.15pm each evening, the following day’s passenger lists are announced on the radio, guaranteeing everybody in this close-knit society knows everyone’s business.

Mother Nature’s theatre

“Hold on tight, this landing can loosen a few fillings,” said pilot Andrew as we descended to 20 sq km Bleaker Island in the south-east Falklands. Buffeting winds strafed the flat, grazed, treeless grasslands as Bleaker’s owners, Mike and Phyll Rendell – the sort of self-sufficient islanders I’d encounter all over – came to greet me. “We’ve got 1,100 merino-wool sheep, 67 Herefords and a human population of four... no, make that five – we’ve just hired Cecilia the Chilean cook,” Mike told me. British-born, he came to the Falklands as a Royal Marine and met Phyll. “I’ve been here since 1983 and I’m still on trial,” he joked.

Phyll herself was actually dashing off – to pursue her role as member of the islands’ legislature. “We punch well above our weight,” she ►

Falkland Islands

◀ said. “Sometimes I’m dealing with the fallout from Argentinean diplomacy; other weeks it’s the grass not being mowed in Stanley.”

I stayed at Cassard House, a homely red-roofed bungalow with five rooms overlooking a coastal headland. In between eating (afternoon tea and cake, homemade sausages for breakfast), there was ample time to explore Bleaker’s wildlife-drenched plains.

I hiked alone, watching jet-propelled clouds cast ever-changing shadows across the grassland. Fending off the avaricious Antarctic skuas that coveted my picnic, I settled by mile-long Sandy Bay for my first taste of penguin-mania. Small Magellanics (called jackasses because of their braying) were the court jesters, moving as if glued together in mortal panic before diving into peaty burrows. More robust gentoos were curious and approached closely after torpedoing from the surf.

I wandered inland to an animated colony of 8,000 pairs of tall imperial cormorants, which were huddled together to nurse their chicks. They chattered noisily, but not for fun – these were harrowing warnings. Predatory skuas (my wannabe sandwich thieves) encircled the cormorants, picking off ailing chicks and harassing returning adults, forcing them to regurgitate the food intended for their offspring.

Wildlife-watching here is pure theatre, but it’s of the genuine life-versus-death kind.

Don’t sit on the seals...

When I arrived on Sea Lion Island, lodge-manager Jenny Luxton related a cheerier tale of survival. “A juvenile orca was stranded on our beach. Its mother was frantic, squealing offshore. It took us two

hours to turn the youngster back into the ocean,” she explained. “Then the mother resurfaced and waved her flippers towards us. I’m sure she was saying thank you.”

Although a similar size to Bleaker, Sea Lion Island sits in deeper ocean, a 15-minute flight south. Without grazing livestock, this national nature reserve supports a luxuriant thatch of clumpy tussock grass and diddle-dee bushes. The lodge is the most southerly British hotel in the world.

It had been a harsh summer on the island. Jenny drove me northwards, past a withering vegetable garden built over a pit once used by early settlers to render penguins. “It was seven rockhoppers to a gallon of oil,” she said.

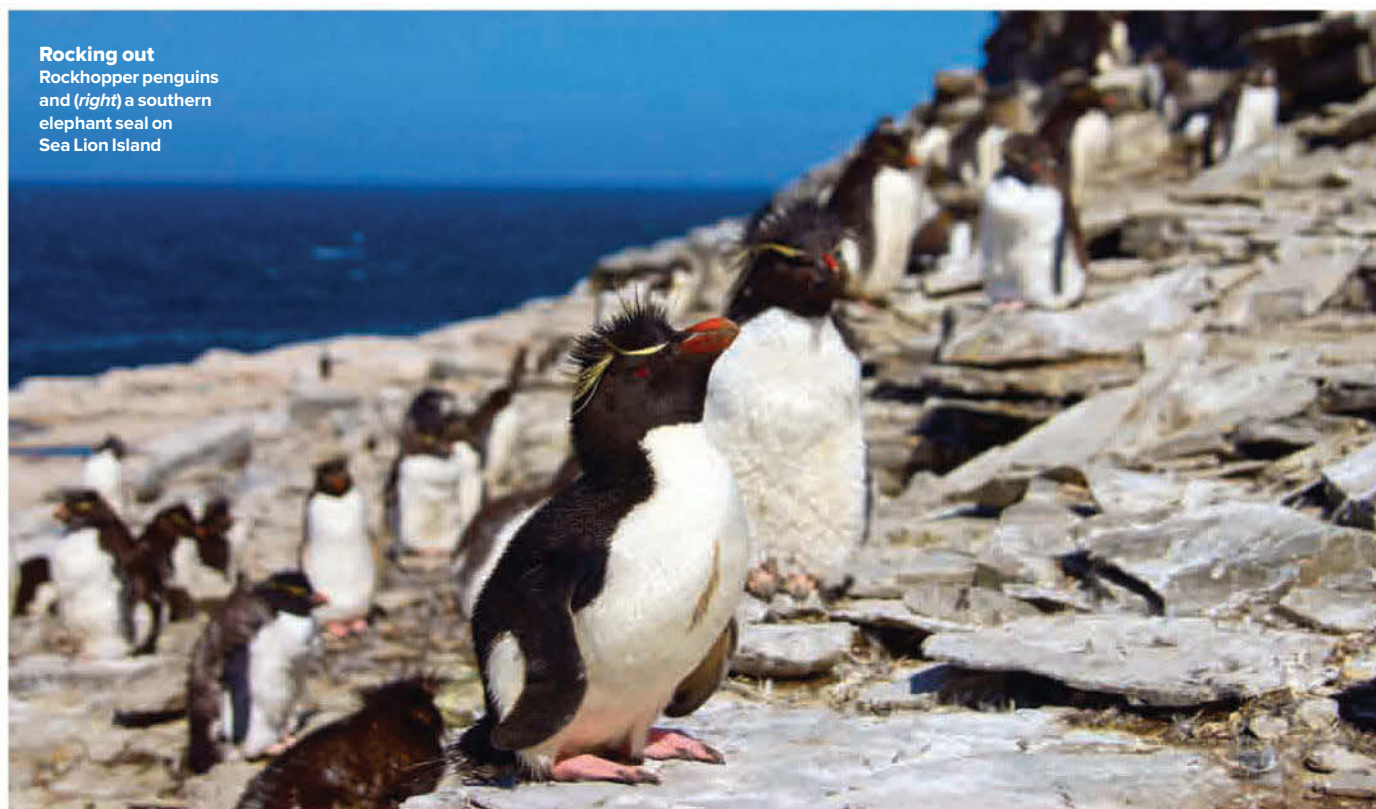
Near a memorial to *HMS Sheffield*, sunk 40 miles offshore in 1982, we stopped by a rockhopper colony. These 50cm-high penguins have punk Mohawks, yellow eyebrows and the countenance of mad professors. They didn’t seem too bright though: their cliff-top roost was over 20m high and, rather than choosing a nice smooth beach from which to bellyflop into the sea, they bounded hazardingly down between ledges, waiting to be swept up by the ocean’s ferocious swell.

They’d had a bad breeding season. “Almost no chicks have been raised,” said Jenny. “Unseasonal storms soaked and chilled the chicks, then skuas moved in to annihilate the survivors.” Damn those skuas.

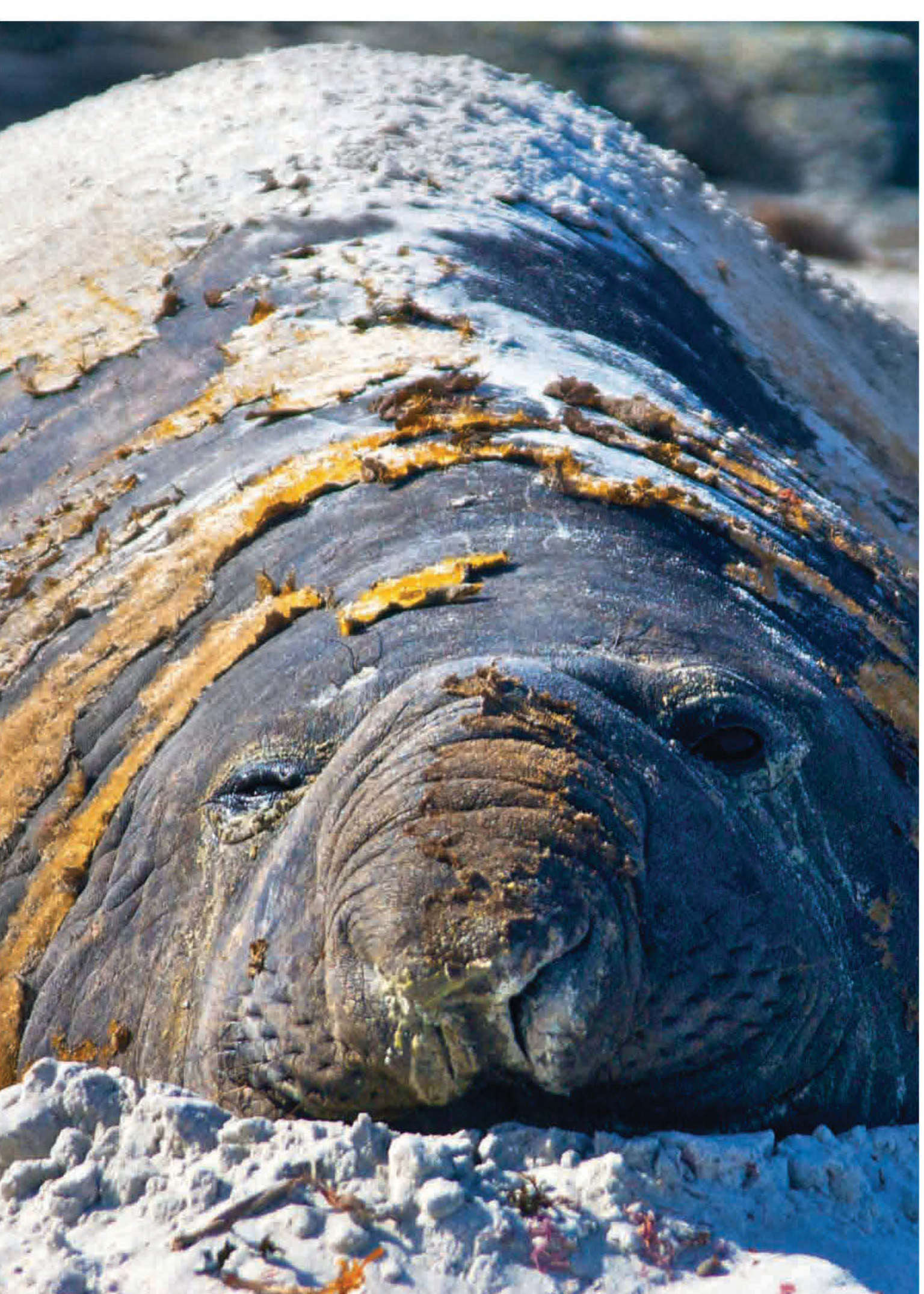
But today sunshine bathed Sea Lion Island. I walked for six hours without seeing anybody, adrift of the modern world. I visited sea lions and looked wave-wards for killer whales amid the russet-brown kelp.

I also learned that it’s imperative not to sit on anything resembling a boulder amid the tussock grasses because it may have big eyes ▶

‘We stop by a rockhopper colony where these 50cm-high pugnacious penguins with punk Mohawks and yellow eyebrows possess the countenance of mad professors’



Rocking out
Rockhopper penguins
and (right) a southern
elephant seal on
Sea Lion Island





Landing strips

(clockwise from this)
East Falklands from a
FIGAS flight; Antarctic
skuas on Bleaker
Island; gentoo
penguins on Leopard
Beach; Stanley
Cathedral; Mike and
Phyll Rendell; FIGAS Air
Service prepare
another flight; (left)
a crush of king penguins
at Volunteer Point



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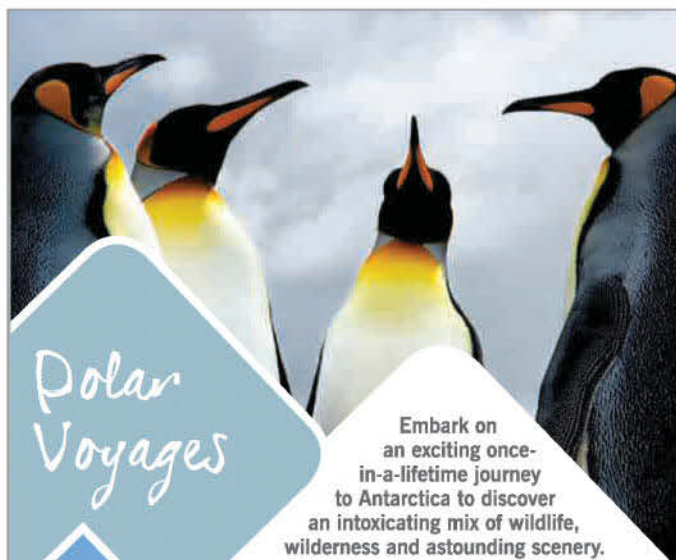
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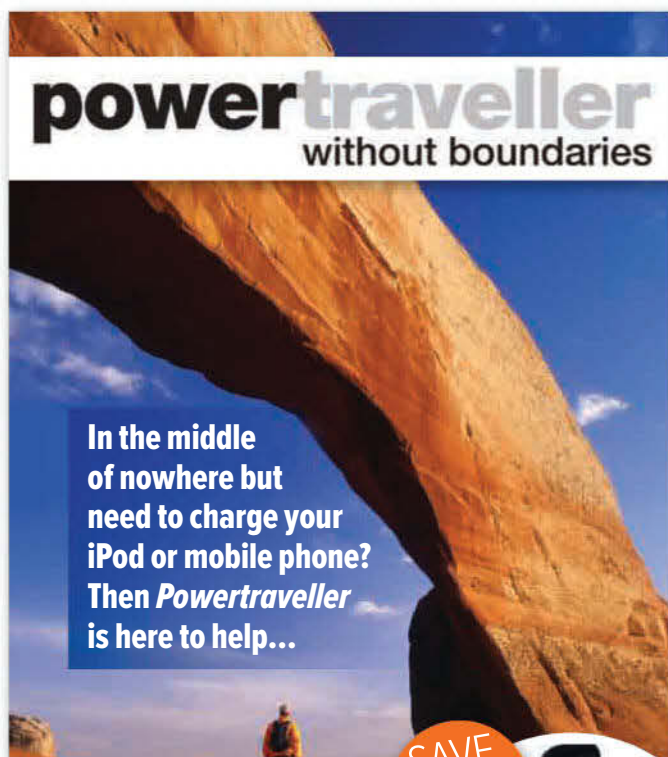
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◀ and folds of blubber. Preposterously inelegant tubs of lard, the elephant seal bulls had beached themselves to moult: a process that involves lazing around for a few months rasping, belching and groaning.

I paced out one large bull: he was 3.5m long. “It’s nothing,” Italian researcher Filippo Galimberto later told me. “A young bull, six years old, not so big. They can weigh 3.5 tonnes.” Living in a small hut with his wife, small baby and limited funding, Filippo has been researching elephant seals for 19 seasons. His love of the islands and his passion for these fatty blobs imbues him with the fierce determination needed to prevail in the Falklands.

“Post-moulting, elephant seals hunt over hundreds of kilometers of ocean to depths of 1,500m,” Filippo continued. Those he’s studied in Mexico have a more chaotic social structure with harems easily splintered and pups neglected. “Not here,” he explained. “The bulls have control of the harems (some 130 females strong) and the pups are fully weaned. They’re typically British,” he laughed, “so very organised”.

Yet there’s a subversive irony about them: Filippo suspects many have migrated here from Argentina. Perhaps I should’ve alerted naval patrol?

‘Preposterously inelegant tubs of lard, the elephant seal bulls had beached themselves to moult, a process that involves lazing around for a few months rasping, belching and groaning’

Born survivors

The following morning I crossed the archipelago to the largely uninhabited West Falklands. I buzzed over scattered farmsteads and swathes of bleak moorland punctuated by black tarns and white-sand coves before bulbous grey massifs rose on the western isles.

With a humour as arid as Carcass Island’s three-year drought, farmer Rob McGill is perhaps the hardest septuagenarian I’ve ever encountered. Owner of this 17 sq km island for 40 years with wife Lorraine, their remote fiefdom is named after the 19th-century *HMS Carcass* – arguably the most unromantically named vessel in naval history. At the base of a rounded zoom outcrop, their two-storey weatherboard-clad farmstead snuggles within a wind-contorted shelterbelt – the first trees I’d seen in days.

The tireless McGill is either milking his dairy cows at dawn to put fresh milk on the breakfast table, driving visitors to penguin colonies or moving his beef cattle around – inevitably with his sheepdog, Sidney, chasing behind. “I’m an outdoors person,” he said. “Whenever I go to Stanley I want to get out. We have Skype here so I can keep in contact.”

He left Stanley on the morning of the 1982 invasion to return to Carcass. “The governor said we weren’t going to be invaded so should go about our business. So I did, and my wife and children were left trapped in Stanley. Not his best piece of advice,” he remarked drily.

Lorraine could look after herself though. She was part of a mercy convoy of vehicles evacuating schoolchildren back to their families in ‘Camp’ (the countryside outside Stanley). “It was surreal,” she recalled. “We had to siphon petrol and use local boats to deliver the children. But islanders are resilient. You improvise here and get on with life.”

Carcass’s unmissable foray is to West Point Island, an hour’s boat ride away, to see its 14,000 pairs of black-browed albatrosses. As I boarded the Condor, boatman Michael Clarke and his wife, Jeanette, were on tenterhooks. “My grandson Stefan has sheared 116 sheep before breakfast,” Jeanette announced. “He needs to do nearly 50 an hour today to break the record [461]”. Sheep shearing is the national sport. They may lose to Greenland at football but Falklanders are premier league at removing fleeces. ►



Land blubber
An elephant seal roams further inland on Carcass Island for a spot of basking in the grass

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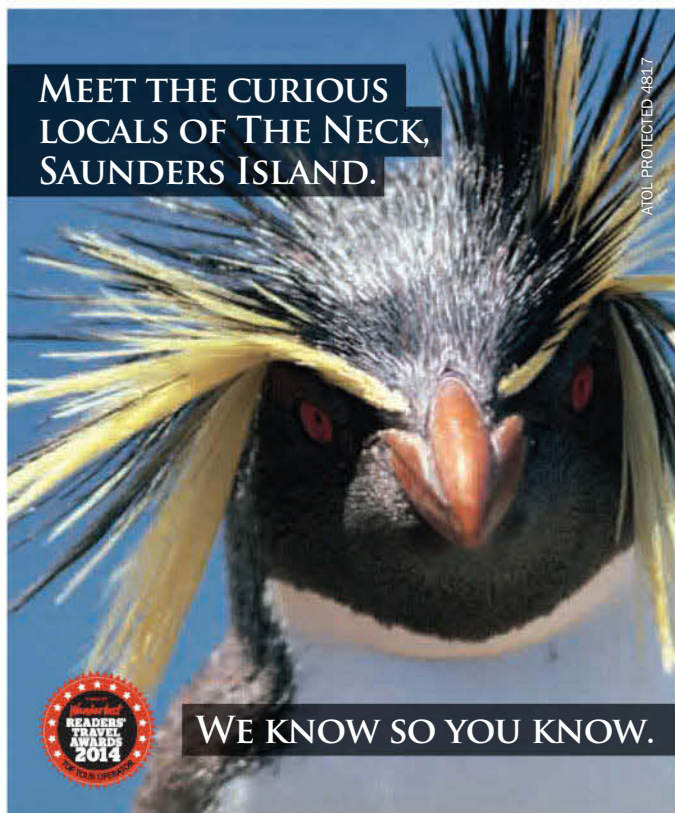
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Homeshare
Black-browed
albatrosses and
rockhopper
penguins eye each
other warily on
West Point Island

‘On West Point, I sat among hundreds of pairs of utterly trusting albatrosses. They were preening and feeding their furry grey chicks, already the size of Christmas turkeys’

◀ The Clarkes later told me that, during the invasion, they’d been confined by Argentine troops in a building in Douglas. When commandos ended their ordeal, they were ecstatic. “We had 14 soldiers at a time sleeping in our living room,” said Jeanette. “I baked them cakes all day and washed their socks.”

On West Point, where 45°-angled cliffs crumble into the ocean, I sat among hundreds of utterly trusting albatrosses. They were preening and feeding their furry chicks, already the size of Christmas turkeys, which chirped on potty-shaped nests. Utilising strong gusts, the parents unfurled their 2m wingspans to effortlessly lift off, before returning so close overhead that the draught of their wingbeats ruffled my hair.

On the Condor’s return journey, Jeanette was disappointed: Stefan had sheared 433 sheep, missing out on the record.

A bit of Britain

Back in Stanley, a farrago of enduring Britishness exists. Union Jacks rustle over brightly roofed dwellings; the governor’s house has a lawn ripe for tea parties; there are red telephone boxes, and Deano’s Bar offers fish ‘n’ chips ‘n’ darts. The editorial of the *Penguin News* leaves you in no doubt of allegiances: ‘Argentine policy on Falklands is doomed says FCO minister’. I wondered how often it had run that headline.

Yet it would be lazy to stereotype Stanley as a stagnant throwback. A modern hospital and school have been paid for out of the islands’ own fisheries money. With zero unemployment and petroleum speculation, there is an influx of labour, particularly from Chile, to supplement an already significant Chilean Falkland community. Opportunities exist for those embracing self-reliance. A policeman

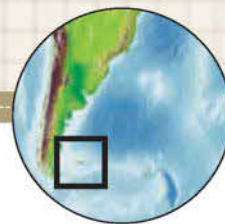
told me he’d recently arrived in Stanley seeking a less stressful existence from investment banking in London: “Crime is ridiculously low. I just spent the afternoon searching for a lost sheep.”

On an excursion from Stanley to Volunteer Point, Patrick Watts and I drove past Sapper’s Hill, one of the spartan outcrops where Anglo-Argentine battles raged. Now, 200 new homes are being built here. “It’s important to see signs of progress so when veterans return they’ll see they fought for something,” Patrick said. The war still seemed to simmer in his soul. “Those last days were the worst,” he added. “There was so much shelling, you didn’t know where they were going to fall.”

We talked war, nature and radio broadcasting during an off-road journey over boggy moorland with granite-topped hills. At Volunteer Point, the landscape melted into a pearl-white beach that was peopled by kings. Bearing golden stains on their necks – like treacle slopped down a child’s white bib – the world’s second-largest penguin species obligingly mingled within a circle of stones set aside for penguins; this time it was humans, not menacing skuas, that encircled them, snatching the easiest wildlife photographs imaginable. Over 1,000 pairs raise their chicks here between November and April.

Sometimes they leave their safety in numbers to form lines and waddle down to the soft white foreshore. Entering the ocean they trumpet loudly, heads held high. They look proud, defiant – more characteristics shared with the hardy humans who survive at the edge of the earth. 🐧

Mark Stratton is an intrepid multi-award-winning travel writer who has visited more than 110 countries.



Falkland Islands Footnotes

VITAL STATISTICS

Capital: Port Stanley
Population: 3,140
Language: English
Time: GMT-3
International dialling code: +500
Visas: Not required for UK nationals
Money: Falkland Islands pound (FKP), equal to the UK£

When to go

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec

- **Best time to visit:** temperatures are warmish (10-15°C), though it's very windy; expect four seasons in one day. Wildlife highlights include **penguin and albatross chicks**
- **Wet and cold** Magellanic penguins crowd beaches
- **Winter:** average lows drop to 0°C in July. Liberation Day is on 14 June
- **Spring** highlights include elephant seals arriving and killer whale sightings

Health & safety

The combination of sun and wind can leave you red-faced so sunscreen is important. Remaining Argentinean minefields are fenced off but it doesn't preclude stray ordnance laying concealed – seek local advice if heading off the beaten track.

Further reading & information

Birds and Mammals of the Falkland Islands (Princeton Uni, 2006)
The Battle for the Falklands (Pan Military Classics, 2010) by Max Hastings & Simon Jenkins, is an authoritative account of 1982. Or watch Patrick Watts' **live invasion broadcast** (www.youtube.com/watch?v=REGYK49DAIY).
falklandislands.com Falkland Islands Tourist Board (0207 839 2140)
lata.org Latin American Travel Association

More online

Visit www.wanderlust.co.uk/146 for links to more content from the trip

ARCHIVE ARTICLES

- ◆ 7 places to spot 7 types of penguin – online
- ◆ Spotting nature on the Falkland Islands – issue 102
- ◆ **PLANNING GUIDES**
- ◆ Falkland Islands travel guide

THE TRIP

Cox & Kings (020 7873 5000, coxandkings.co.uk) offers an eight-day Falkland Islands Encounters trip (including the small islands) costing from £2,095pp including flights from Santiago, transfers, excursions and full-board accommodation. It offers international return flights from London with a two-night stopover in Santiago (Chile) for £1,295pp.

Getting there

An **MOD Airbridge** civilian charter (020 7222 2542, travel@falklands.gov.fk) flies twice-weekly from RAF Brize Norton (Oxfordshire) to the Falklands' Mount Pleasant Airport via the Ascension Isles. Journey time is 20 hours; returns cost from £2,222. Alternatively, **Chilean carrier LAN** (0800 977 6100, lan.com) flies weekly to Mount Pleasant from London via Santiago and Punta Arenas. Flights costs around £1,400. Break up the long journey with a few nights in Chile; see www.chile.travel for options.

The only other way to arrive is by cruise ship.

Getting around

If you're not travelling with a tour operator, you will need to book your transport in advance. For **transfers** from Mount Pleasant Airport to Stanley contact Falkland Islands Tours & Travel (£17 each way; falklandtravel.com) or Penguin Travel (£14 each way; penguintravel-falklands.com).

FIGAS (0207 222 2542, travel@falklands.gov.fk) runs inter-island light aircraft services. Advance booking is required; passengers will be contacted the night before departure to confirm times. Sample one-way prices include: Stanley to Bleaker (£75), Carcass to Stanley (£139).

A **ferry service** runs between East and West Falkland (www.workboat.co.fk); returns for foot passengers cost £20. Boat excursions to West Point's albatrosses can be arranged via Carcass Island or the tourist board; these cost £80pp (minimum of three passengers).

Malvina House Hotel arranges **car hire** from £52 per day. For **private guiding**, contact Patrick Watts MBE (+500 21383; pwatts@horizon.co.fk) and, for birding, Micky Reeves (Falklands Conservation; falklandsconservation.com).

Cost of travel

Imported goods and food **cost more than in the UK**. Outside Stanley there are few restaurants; main meals cost around £15. **Alcohol is very cheap**,

Own private isle
 Stay at Cassard House and you'll have Bleaker Island virtually to yourself



particularly Chilean wine. If you island-hop then the cost of FIGAS flights adds up. Accommodation is good value with full-board ranging from £50 to £160 per night.

Accommodation

Malvina House Hotel (Stanley; malvinahousehotel.com) is one of the best, with sea views and a great restaurant. B&B doubles from £65pppn.

Cassard House (Bleaker Island; bleakerisland.com) offers warm hospitality in a modern coastal bungalow with underfloor heating. Full-board from £84.75pppn.

Sea Lion Lodge (Sea Lion Island; +500 32004, sealionisland.com) is an established lodge close to an elephant seal beach. Full-board from £90pppn.

Carcass Island Farm House (Carcass Island; +500 41106, lorraine@horizon.co.fk) is a homely homestead serving its own produce. Full-board from £115pppn.

Volunteer House (East Falkland; +500 3200, drp@horizon.co.fk) offers two rooms for overnighting at Volunteer Point to see the king penguins. Full-board doubles cost £50pppn.

If overnighting in **Santiago** en route to the Falklands, the airport's **Holiday Inn** (www.ihg.com/holidayinn) is very convenient. If staying longer, try **Castillo Rojo** (www.castillorohotel.com), a classical residence in the Bellavista neighbourhood.

Food & drink

Local produce is very good. Although **familiarly British** – pubs in Stanley serve fish and chips while full English breakfasts come almost as standard – the ubiquitous Chilean chefs cook with flair. **Lamb and beef are excellent as is the seafood**, particularly local toothfish and sublime Loligo squid. Try the excellent Waterfront Restaurant in Stanley (waterfronthotel.co.fk).

Most **wine is Chilean**. The main beer is Rockhopper.

TOP WILDLIFE MOMENTS

- 1 **The sooty shearwater night migration** Seeing thousands of birds set off for Kidney Island.
- 2 **Visiting the world's largest albatross colony** There are 250,000 pairs at Steeple Jason.
- 3 **Orca hunting elephant seals** Killer whale action on Sea Lion Island
- 4 **Gentoo penguin patrol** The birds walk along the beach for over 1km at Volunteer Point.
- 5 **Watching rockhopper penguins** The birds burst ashore through the waves at New Island.



TRAVEL EXPERIENCED



FACE TO FACE WITH THE FALKLAND ISLANDS

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that can be effortlessly shared with family and friends. But it doesn't just transform long-range optical devices into telephoto zoom lenses, it's also a lighter, cheaper and more versatile alternative to SLR, DSLR or compact system cameras, getting you professional-looking shots in a flash. The adaptor is available now, priced £113, from authorised Swarovski Optik stockists.

- 1 PROTECTIVE FRAME** Made from lightweight aluminium for maximum robustness, the PA-i5 adaptor frame provides everyday protection for your iPhone 5/5s. It has a fastener at the bottom, which is released so the phone can be slid in and out.
- 2 NECK STRAP** The loop is threaded into ready-made holes in the frame and connected to the strap using the click fastener. Once around your neck, there is also a push button for adjusting the length of the strap so you can wear it around your wrist instead.
- 3 ADAPTOR RING** One of six rings is supplied with the adaptor, so you can connect the whole range of Swarovski Optik spotting scopes and binoculars straight to your iPhone's camera lens. Simply attach the appropriate ring to the frame, fit your binoculars' eyecup to it and you're good to go. Compatible models include: CL Companion, EL family (32, 42, 50), new SLC family (42, 56), EL Range, ATX/STX, ATS/STS, and ATM/STM.



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**Iceland
Road Trip**
see p65

■ **This month's experts include:** Round-the-world supersailor Nik Brbora, p62 ♦
Publishing insider Peter Moore, p65 ♦ West Sweden svengali James Proctor, p67 ♦
Health guru Dr Jane Wilson-Howarth, p68 ♦ Waterfall framer Steve Davey, p70 ♦

Into the blue

There are a number of ways that beginners can dip their toes into the watery world of sailing



■ The *Wanderlust* Masterclass

Could you survive a sailing trip?

Thinking about trying a sailing trip but not sure what to expect? Here's how to get started, from gauging the costs, to knowing the risks, to deciding where to go, to – eventually – becoming a master of the seas.

Why sail?

For the wind in your hair and the sun on your back. Dee Caffari – the first yachswoman to sail single-handed around the world in both directions – suggests it's the power of nature that makes a sailing adventure so attractive: "You feel insignificant against a vast ocean.

Mountainous seas and gale-force winds are far stronger than you can ever imagine."

It's also a way to see parts of the world and wildlife your land-lubbing counterparts won't, adds Nik Brbora. He completed the Clipper Round The World Yacht Race in 2012 and during his circumnavigation he was lucky enough to see pods of whales, glowing bioluminescence in the waves and outstanding crimson sunsets.

Find your sea-legs

As romantic as it sounds, it obviously can get rough so, first, make sure you actually enjoy life on a boat. The reality of a floating existence

can mean being confined in a small space, possibly getting seasick, being away from certain creature comforts. Is it for you? Test out life on the water by committing to a day or weekend sailing trip locally first. If you enjoyed that, then take the plunge and sign up for an easy-going week's cruise abroad – such as a Turkish *gulet* (wooden sailing yacht).

Like that and you could graduate to a skippered yacht or a flotilla trip. On the former, a qualified sailor mans the helm and you can help out as much as you like. On flotilla trips, a small group of yachts sail a planned route together, following a lead boat manned by an experienced skipper and crew.

'Sailing means that you can explore amazing parts of the world that are otherwise inaccessible by road and sometimes air, such as Antarctica and the islands of the South Pacific'

For introductory sailing trips Bruce Jacobs, of adventure sailing company Rubicon 3, recommends destinations such as Croatia, Greece or Italy. The need for qualifications before embarking on a flotilla trip varies between countries and areas – so do check.

Learn some skills

To get the most out of a sailing trip and feel involved in the experience you should, quite literally, learn the ropes. Novices should begin at the Royal Yachting Association (rya.org.uk) or, for our US readers, the American Sailing Association (asa.com), with numerous schools countrywide. Nik recommends RYA Competent Crew and Day Skipper courses; both take about five days to complete. He adds that sailing in the UK offers the best practise: "With its tough weather and tides, the saying is: 'if you can sail in the English Channel or North Sea you can sail anywhere.'"

However, Dee argues that first experiences should be positive rather than rough: "The wind should be kind and the temperatures warm." Gibraltar and Australia's tropical Whitsunday Islands are good places to start, with safe and reputable sailing schools.

To actually take the helm and skipper a boat, though not a legal requirement, it's worth gaining the RYA Yachtmaster certificate. It's a big commitment though – before the exam you must have completed at least 96 uninterrupted hours at sea, traversed 200 miles and helped select the route as a skipper or mate of watch.

Another way to gain instant experience is to do as Nik did and go from amateur to globe circumnavigator by entering the year-long Clipper race (clipperroundtheworld.com), an event that gives novice crew members the chance to sail around the world for around £30,000 – or join just one leg (£4,000).

Learning the techniques of sailing is just one part of becoming a bona fide sailor. If you're dreaming of taking your own epic voyage around the world you'll need to learn a lot, from first aid to using a radio, meteorology, boat maintenance, right down to fixing a diesel engine.

Joining a crew

Fortunately, you don't need a yacht of your own to sail the world – you can jump aboard someone else's. You may be able to secure a free berth on a sailing boat (including bunk, board and transport) in exchange for labour. You'll be at an advantage if you have some sailing experience or qualification. If you can cook or clean, you could get an entry-level position as a deckhand, steward or chef.

Fruitful places to find a free ride include Caribbean ports, the Azores and Southampton in the UK. Crewseekers (www.crewseekers.net) is a good place to start; also yachting magazines or local sailing clubs.

What to expect

Sailing expeditions vary greatly, depending on whether you're planning to cross the English Channel, traverse an ocean or sail around the globe. You'll spend a good proportion of time prepping the boat and checking those vital weather charts. All expeditions require a lot of planning, Bruce says: "Once you are far from shore, it's too late to think about missing items or find the vessel is not fit for purpose."

Where to sail?

Consider the time of year and likely winds, currents and storms. "We often leave the northern hemisphere in the early winter so we can sail in the Southern Ocean during its summer," says Dee. "Other concerns are the Caribbean hurricane season and ice in the extreme north or south." If you just want to explore a nice spot for a few weeks, there are plenty of options. The 32 islands

of the Grenadines are a good Caribbean choice – the trade winds are reliable and the waters sheltered. Cape Town is a good year-round sailing destination; sailing courses here tend to be good value, and you might spot penguins, dolphins and whales from the deck.

Be aware that some territories are riskier than others: the Malacca Straits, the Bering Sea, the Bermuda Triangle, the North Atlantic, Cape Horn – to name a few. But as Dee says: "If it were easy, everyone would be doing it!"

Case study

NIK BRBORA

This 31-year-old Londoner leads a double life, part software engineer, part round-the-world sailor.



What do you love about sailing?

Sailing is very environmentally friendly since you are only using

wind to propel you. It also means that you can explore amazing parts of the world that are otherwise inaccessible by road and sometimes air, such as Antarctica, islands of the South Pacific and so on. It is also very peaceful and relaxing, so is a great form of escapism.

What are the negatives? Like all extreme sports it can be very dangerous. If you're racing then you don't usually wait for a gap in bad weather or avoid storms – you just deal with it.

Have you had any scary experiences?

In 2012, when sailing from China to the USA, we were in the middle of a massive low-pressure system with hurricane-force winds. The conditions were awful and it was so windy that we had no sails up and were still going fast. One night we got hit by a freak wave: it was like a skyscraper of water hitting the boat. A few people including myself got injured. One lady was so critical that the US coastguard had to send out a rescue ship (after several other airlifting attempts failed due to severe conditions). It reminds you of the might of the ocean and that you can never be complacent.

How do you reduce risk?

With good planning, a robust boat and safety gear, and knowledge of how to sail in rough conditions. In return, you get rewarded with 'champagne sailing' days, when the sea is flat, the breeze is warm and the wildlife is abundant.

What are your top tips for novices?

It's a steep learning curve because you have to learn a new language, a new craft and face very scary situations. But the rewards are amazing so go in knowing that it will take time to learn and get proficient. You can't become a good sailor overnight and most great sailors will tell you that they are still learning every day. 📌

TOP TIP

Safety onboard is paramount. Keep fingers and loose clothing away from winches and when moving around always remember – one hand for you and one hand for the boat – in case of sudden jolts.

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Magazine





A to B (via S)
Route 1 curves
around some of
Iceland's highlights

■ Instant Expert

Route 1, Iceland



Should I really care about a boring old road?

That's almost 1,350km of road to be precise. And yes, you should. Iceland's Route 1, which celebrates its 40th anniversary this month, offers travellers a chance to circumnavigate this rumbling island, and access some of its wildest reaches in a humble 2WD.

So it's quite important then?

Indeed. This circular highway – mostly asphalt, with sections of gravel – loops around almost the entire perimeter of the country. It enables Icelanders to get around and self-driving travellers to embark on one of the world's best road trips. The roadside views – glaciers, Atlantic swells, weird rocks, huffing volcanoes – rival any found in self-drive favourites New Zealand and the USA.

OK, so what is there to see?

Route 1 conveniently passes many of Iceland's primary draws. Anticlockwise from Reykjavík, it skirts the cascade at Selfoss, the jet-black beaches of Vík, the Jökulsárlón glacier lagoon, the vast-n-ice-cloaked

Vatnajökull National Park, remote Egilsstaðir, Lake Mývatn and the northern capital of Akureyri. It also provides access to several spur roads – for instance, routes into Thingvellir National Park (for icy snorkels at Silfra) and along the Snæfellsnes Peninsula.

But if it's the only road, won't it be busy?

Not really. Only 315,000 people live in Iceland, and two-thirds of them live in Reykjavík. Once you leave the capital, the roads will likely be clear – especially outside high summer, and especially in the far east (from Egilsstaðir to Akureyri).

I'm sold, when is the best time to go?

Now. Although it's possible to drive Route 1 in winter (ideally with a 4WD, common sense and experience of icy conditions), it's much safer to travel in the spring and summer months. From April, there are fewer tourists, and daylight hours span from 4am to 10pm. Prices are lower than in July-August and there's still the slim chance of witnessing everyone's favourite light show – the aurora borealis – on clear nights.

Time to hit the road!

■ 5-step guide to...


WRITING AND PUBLISHING A TRAVEL BOOK

1 Have an idea What's your book about? A strong, easy-to-encapsulate reason behind your journey (hitchhiking round Ireland with a fridge; being first to trace the Malagarasi River) is vital. It's what will get people interested.

2 Find your 'voice' Don't try to write like someone else. Pretend you're telling your story to mates down the pub. Write your way. That said, ensure your sentences are well constructed and your ideas clearly expressed. Get your manuscript professionally edited – check self-publishing sites for recommendations; it doesn't cost much.

3 Check out the competition A quick Amazon search will reveal which travel books people are buying and the kinds of covers they expect them to have.

4 Use online resources Self-publishing sites such as CreateSpace (owned by Amazon) and Smashwords are full of free advice, inspiration and guidance from people who've been there and done it.

5 Remember the marketing The ease of self-publishing means lots of people are doing it. To stand out from the crowd, you must be as creative and dedicated to publicising your book as you are writing it if you want it to succeed. 

*Peter Moore is Associate Web Editor at Wanderlust and author of six travel narratives including **The Wrong Way Home** and **Vroom with a View**. www.petermoore.net.*

ASK THE EXPERTS

The risks of African bushmeat, making the most of the South West Coast Path, Swedish camp 'n' kayaking and southern light spotting – our experts answer your travel queries...

THE EXPERTS



DR JANE WILSON-HOWARTH
Wanderlust's health guru
(www.wilson-howarth.com)



MARK OWEN
National Trail Officer,
South West Coast Path
(southwestcoastpath.com)



CLARE WILSON
Wanderlust writer & contributor



JAMES PROCTOR
Author, *Bradt Guide to West Sweden* (published May 2014;
bradtguides.com)

Q I've heard that people have died after eating bushmeat in central Africa. How risky is it?

Simon, by email

A First, don't eat it. Much of it comes from endangered species (in this region it's often gorilla, chimp or monkey) and buying it encourages this illegal trade.

However, if you inadvertently come across bushmeat, know this: eating it is risky, especially if the species is evolutionarily close to us. There are potentially a host of exceedingly unpleasant killer-viruses that may be present in wild primates. Recently 25 villagers in Cameroon died after consuming the carcass of a dead gorilla; it is thought that these people caught ebola virus.

However, the greatest risk of bushmeat is to hunters and butchers, who can get infected if bitten by the hunted animal, or if blood from the animal enters a scratch. Many scientists believe that HIV originated in chimps (as simian foamy virus), which infected people via these routes. SFV then mutated to become the pathogen of humans.

If in doubt of the meat's provenance, stay vegetarian.

Dr Jane Wilson-Howarth

Q I am of medium fitness, like my creature comforts and only have one week – which section of England's

South West Coast Path would you suggest?

Helen Thomas, by email

A For the ultimate Coast Path experience over six days, the south coast of Cornwall, from Penzance to Falmouth, is difficult to beat. Simply step off the train at Penzance, cross the road towards the seafront and turn right, following the acorns on the waymarked signs.

The route includes two major Cornish ports at each end with sandy beaches and rocky cliffs in between, as well as the southernmost tip of England at Lizard Point. Much of this walk is designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. There's some extraordinary geology to look out for including serpentine, granite and schist rocks, which provide great environments for a variety of plants and wildlife. The last leg of the journey takes you past two beautiful estuaries, the Helford and the Fal, leading to Falmouth.

You can see a full breakdown of the itinerary online at www.southwestcoastpath.com/tracks. The site also suggests accommodation options – there are plenty of B&Bs for those who don't fancy camping. If you don't want to carry your own bags, the Luggage Transfers Service can transport them for you; transferring two bags generally costs around £15.

Mark Owen, National Trail Officer, South West Coast Path

Southern comforts
Aurora Australis – or southern lights – at Halley Bay research station Antarctica

Q I'd like to see the southern lights – is this possible?

If so, where's the best place to start looking?

Pete Chenery, by email

A The main problem with spotting the *aurora australis* (southern lights) is that there's much less land at the southern polar latitudes compared to the north.

Also, similarly to the northern lights, they're only visible in winter – April-August. This means that, in order to stand a chance, you're faced with the double whammy of having to travel in poor weather conditions to a very limited number of places.

But it is still possible to view them. The Falkland Islands, Tasmania and Stewart Island,



■ Insiders' Guide to...

AZORES



Adventure tour operator Exodus (exodus.co.uk) is celebrating its 40th year. **Olly Pemberton** – Azores Product Specialist – gives us the lowdown on one of Europe's unsung archipelagos...

TO DO: The Azores is a dramatic set of lush, volcanic islands; each is unique. The best way to explore is on foot – you can even climb Portugal's highest peak, Mt Pico: from the top, sky and sea blend into one, revealing how isolated the archipelago is.

TO SEE: A marine biologist once described the Azores as a motorway service station for trans-Atlantic marine animals. It's a perfect food-rich resting point. On a boat trip here you might spot dolphins, sharks and manta rays. There's also an abundance of whales, including sei, humpback, sperm and – with luck – mighty blues.

TO STAY: Horta, on Faial, is the perfect place to unwind. It's the midway meeting point for yachtsmen crossing the Atlantic, and each yacht that moors here paints a message on the colourful harbour wall. Horta is also home to Peter Café Sport, which serves world-famous G&Ts.

TO EAT: Rich in flavour and extremely fresh, Azorean cuisine offers a twist on traditional Portuguese dishes. Fish might be pulled from the sea and on your plate in minutes, complemented by delicious cheeses and wines. Try *cozido*, meats and vegetables cooked in volcanic vents.



The main problem with spotting the *aurora australis* (southern lights) is that there's much less land at the southern polar latitudes compared to the north

off the south coast of New Zealand's South Island, are your best (most realistic) options. Sightings are more likely in South Georgia and Antarctica, but you'll find it extremely difficult to get there in winter.

There are no guarantees of sightings but you can maximise your chances by being on a south-facing hill (from where you can see the horizon) around the time of a new moon.

Clare Wilson,
Wanderlust contributor

Q I'm thinking of going kayaking and wild camping in Sweden. Where should I go to get the best of both worlds?

Tom Smith, by email

A West Sweden offers a tremendous variety of experiences. Fly into Gothenburg and you'll find kayak rental from Point 65 Kayak Center (www.point65.se), right in the city harbour.

The waters off the Bohuslän coast are ideally suited to

sea kayaking – there are no strong currents or tides and, during the summer, it's relatively warm. There are several operators along the coast; try Upplelsebolaget (www.upplelsebolaget.com), Nautopp (www.nautopp.se) and Skärgårdsidyllen (www.skargardsidyllen.se).

One of the best places for sea kayaking in Bohuslän is from Grundsund, 6km south-west of Fiskebäckskil, at the western tip of Skaftö island. The offshore archipelago here acts as a windbreak, reducing waves and making kayaking smoother and more fun. From May to October you can hire kayaks from Grundsund quay, for anything from a few hours to several days (take a tent if you want a serious

exploration). Tours either head into the archipelago or around the whole of Skaftö. Beginners' kayaking courses are available; check out www.kajakuthyrning-grundsund.se as well as www.westsweden.com/paddlewestsweden.

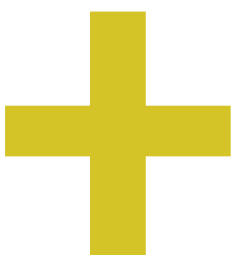
For camping, head to Dalsland. Sparsely populated, it's a land of lakes and forests, making it ideal for outdoor enthusiasts. Make for Dalslands Aktiviteter (www.dalslandsaktiviteter.se). In the north of the province, you can hire kayaks and canoes from Silverlake Canoeing (www.silverlake.se); camp and canoe along the province's many rivers or combine your trip with rail-biking along Dalsland's disused rail lines.

James Proctor, author of
Bradt's new West Sweden guide



TRAVEL CLINIC

with Doctor Jane



How to stop sea sickness

Nothing ruins a journey to an island idyll like the onset of motion sickness – thankfully **Dr Jane Wilson-Howarth** is here to help you combat the quease, whenever it strikes...

Motion sickness is the stomach's expression of confusion.

The brain likes the signals it receives to complement each other and, when they don't, nausea and vomiting ensue. Motion sickness occurs when the signals arriving in the brain from the eyes are at odds with the input from the balance organs in the inner ear.

Blocking out one input can help suppress the problem. Motion sickness medications effectively sedate the part of the brain dealing with motion detection, thereby stopping the conflict of signals by suppressing detection of movement by the organs of the inner ear.

Am I susceptible?

Individuals vary greatly in their susceptibilities, but almost everyone feels unwell in extreme environments – such as on very rough seas (the

Antarctic Ocean is a classic example). Motion sickness is rare in children under the age of two but very common in older children. The peak age for pukiness is between three and 12 years; thereafter many youngsters grow out of it.

Women suffer almost twice as much as men, in the ratio of 1.7 to 1. Strangely people can experience motion sickness if they are not moving but perceive that they are – as in a flight simulator or even at the cinema, although fortunately the usual response is passing queasiness rather than vomiting.

Some adults are especially sensitive to motion but there is also a lot of psychological conditioning: if you vomited on a previous journey and encounter a smell or sensation that reminds you of that experience – such as the odour of airline meals – then nausea can start even before you have moved anywhere. This scenario is perhaps most likely

to respond to positive conditioning or telling your stomach it is acting unreasonably. People do develop 'sea legs' but most journeys are too short, and holiday time too valuable to wait for that to happen.

Those who experience bouts of nausea and even vomiting driven by migraine or Ménière's disease should be aware that their remedies work in different ways and may not help motion sickness even though symptoms can feel similar.

TIMELINE

◆ 30 days before departure

Start strategising. On a cruise, book a cabin amidships on a middle deck. If you have suffered badly in the past, make an appointment to see your GP and ask if Scopoderm patches (hyoscine hydrobromide) might be

appropriate for you. Each takes about six hours to start working and lasts 72 hours.

If you believe your motion sickness has a suggestible or learned element to it – that is, just thinking about travel makes you feel a bit queasy – then hypnosis might be worth trying. Others opt for learning acupressure techniques.

◆ 1 week before departure

Head to the pharmacy – there are several good over-the-counter medicines. Some are rapid-onset and short-acting,





Odds in your favour?
Women and children
are most susceptible
to the effects of
motion sickness

'Individuals vary greatly in their susceptibilities, but almost everyone feels unwell in extreme environments'

such as hyoscine (Joy Rides or Kwells); these are good if you take the wait-and-see approach to using tablets. There are also longer acting antihistamines such as cinnarizine (Stugeron), which is best taken well before the start of the journey and can be taken every eight hours; this is best for long voyages. Some people find acupressure wrist bands (eg Sea-Bands) helpful.

◆ 5 hours before departure

Check the weather forecast. Take your first dose of cinnarizine if you've decided to use an antihistamine. Stick to light, readily digestible food and don't fill your stomach with fluids. The more that's in there, the more it splashes around and the more can come up. If you are using

wrist bands, make sure these are accessible and not packed in your hold luggage.

◆ Departure

Put on your Sea-Bands. On an aircraft the best place to sit is in the centre, between the wings. A central position is also best on a ship. If feeling queasy, fresh air on deck is great – and look at the horizon.

On an aircraft, try to lie back and close your eyes; listen to some music to provide a distraction. Keep away from the galley to minimise exposure to food smells. You'll feel calmer in an aisle seat so you can readily get out for a chunder if necessary.

NEED TO KNOW

Three daily cups of tea made from 1-2g of dried holy basil leaves before and during travel is said to help combat motion sickness too.

get some fresh air. Certainly try to get away from folk who are vomiting. Nibbling on a ginger biscuit can help settle the stomach.

If you are sick, this will probably make you feel better in the short term. Don't then eat a proper meal. If you feel hungry, go for light, minimal nibbles. If you vomit more than once, try taking sips of a drink containing sugar, but avoid anything containing milk. Ribena and apple juice are best because they are sugary, so quickly absorbed from the stomach. Lying down, eyes closed, listening to some favourite music, is often the best therapy.

◆ End of journey

Symptoms almost always subside as soon as you get off the boat or plane but don't then rush to gobble down a big meal. Start with plain light food. You should be fit to drive but use common sense: if you have been ill or are dehydrated, allow some rehydration and recovery time.

If you're facing a return journey that you expect to be just as traumatic, try to get hold of some scopolamine patches – for example, they are available over the counter without prescription in the US. Identify a source of palatable ginger to nibble on; crystallised ginger is a delicious remedy for nausea. 🍵

◆ Start of journey

If you suddenly realise you should have taken a pill (yawning is an early sign) and now need one, hyoscine (preferably a melt-in-the-mouth form) is your best bet. Some airlines and ships have them on offer, but don't rely on this.

Once the nausea has started most preparations are ineffective. Even if you feel fine, resist eating everything and anything just because it's free. Choose high carbohydrate foods and sip at sugary drinks, but don't take in a big volume. Watching a film is an excellent distraction but reading can bring on nausea. If you start feeling queasy, try to focus on a distant view.

◆ Middle of journey

The sea is starting to swell. You feel a little queasy. It is best to

Jane Wilson-Howarth's new book, *Snowfed Waters*, is out in kindle and book form; www.wilson-howarth.com.

TAKE BETTER TRAVEL PHOTOS



Want to take
an image like
this one?

Wanderlust's photo
expert **Steve Davey**
helps you work wonders
with waterfalls

Too many photographers work in automatic, handing over control to their camera. This means the setting choices will tend towards the average. However, your pictures will look more striking and eye-catching if you work in the extremes – and nothing exemplifies this better than the waterfall.

There are essentially two ways to photograph a waterfall. You can use a very fast shutter speed to freeze the water into a frothing, bubbling mass. Or you can use a slow shutter-speed to allow it to morph into a soft, almost unrecognisable blur. The latter is the effect I wanted to achieve when photographing the Khone Phapheng Falls in the Si Phan Don region of Laos.

Taking a shot like this presents certain challenges. The main one was finding a stable place to erect my tripod. Here, the best view was from a wooden platform – but it shook when anyone stepped on it, ruining many of my exposures! 📷

To learn more about shooting waterfalls, check out the new second edition of Steve's Footprint Travel Photography (Footprint, £20), also available on iBookstore and Amazon Kindle.

1 Use a long shutter speed

To achieve a truly ethereal effect you need to use a very long exposure time. Most photographs tend to be shot at exposures of a tiny fraction of a second; to create blur such as this you will need a shutter speed between two and 30 seconds. The longer the shutter-speed the greater the degree of blur.

2 Compose with something solid

Blurred waterfall shots look more effective if some parts of the picture are immobile. This accentuates the blur of the moving water and makes the subject more recognisable. Compose your pictures to show stationary rocks and boulders or the riverbank.

3 Use a filter

Unless you're shooting in very dim conditions, you'll need to reduce the amount of light entering the lens to allow you to use a really long shutter speed without overexposing. Polarising filters cut the light by about a quarter. However, when using very slow shutter speeds you need a neutral density (ND) filter, which cuts out the light by a prescribed number of stops without changing the image colour. For example, using a ten-stop ND filter means that a 16-second exposure will have the light level of a 1/60 second exposure.

TOP TIP

Experiment – take shots at varying shutter speeds to change the amount of blur and achieve completely different effects.

4 Keep it still

Blurred water shots only work if the non-moving parts of the picture are completely still. This provides contrast and emphasises the movement. You will need a stable tripod and a remote release to avoid camera shake. If your camera has one, use the mirror lock-up facility – this moves the mirror out of the way before the exposure is made, which minimises vibrations.



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■ Traveller's Guide To...

SANDALS

Forget the humble flip-flop – sandals have evolved. Whether you need them for simple sightseeing, easy strolling or adventure activities such as hiking and kayaking, they can be the most versatile piece of footwear in your bag

PURPOSE

There are myriad sandals on the market, ranging from basic flip-flops to dedicated walking sandals. Will you go for a slip-on or strapped version? Do you need toe protection? Will you be getting wet? Consider what you're going to use these sandals for and look for the features that best suit your needs.

FIT

You will want some way of securing the sandal to your foot, so you can enjoy what you're doing without worrying about losing a shoe! Look for sandals with adjustable straps so you can get the perfect fit.

WEIGHT

Lightweight sandals are better for your baggage allowance; they can also mean your legs get less tired. However, saving weight can mean sacrificing comfort – lighter shoes may have less cushioning and a thinner sole, leaving your feet struggling on rough ground. Weigh up how much you're prepared to compromise on weight vs comfort.

UPPER

This is usually made from synthetic fabric (lighter and cheaper than leather). Make sure there is cushioning between the straps and your foot to avoid rubbing, which could cause blisters at pressure points – especially around the heel, ankle, front of your foot and toes.

OUTSOLE

Check the lugs – deeper ones of varying size will take longer to wear and give better grip.

MIDSOLE

The difference between sport sandals and regular sandals is usually found in the sole. Look for a sole that offers cushioning, a good balance of flex and stiffness, and is shaped to support your arch and heel.

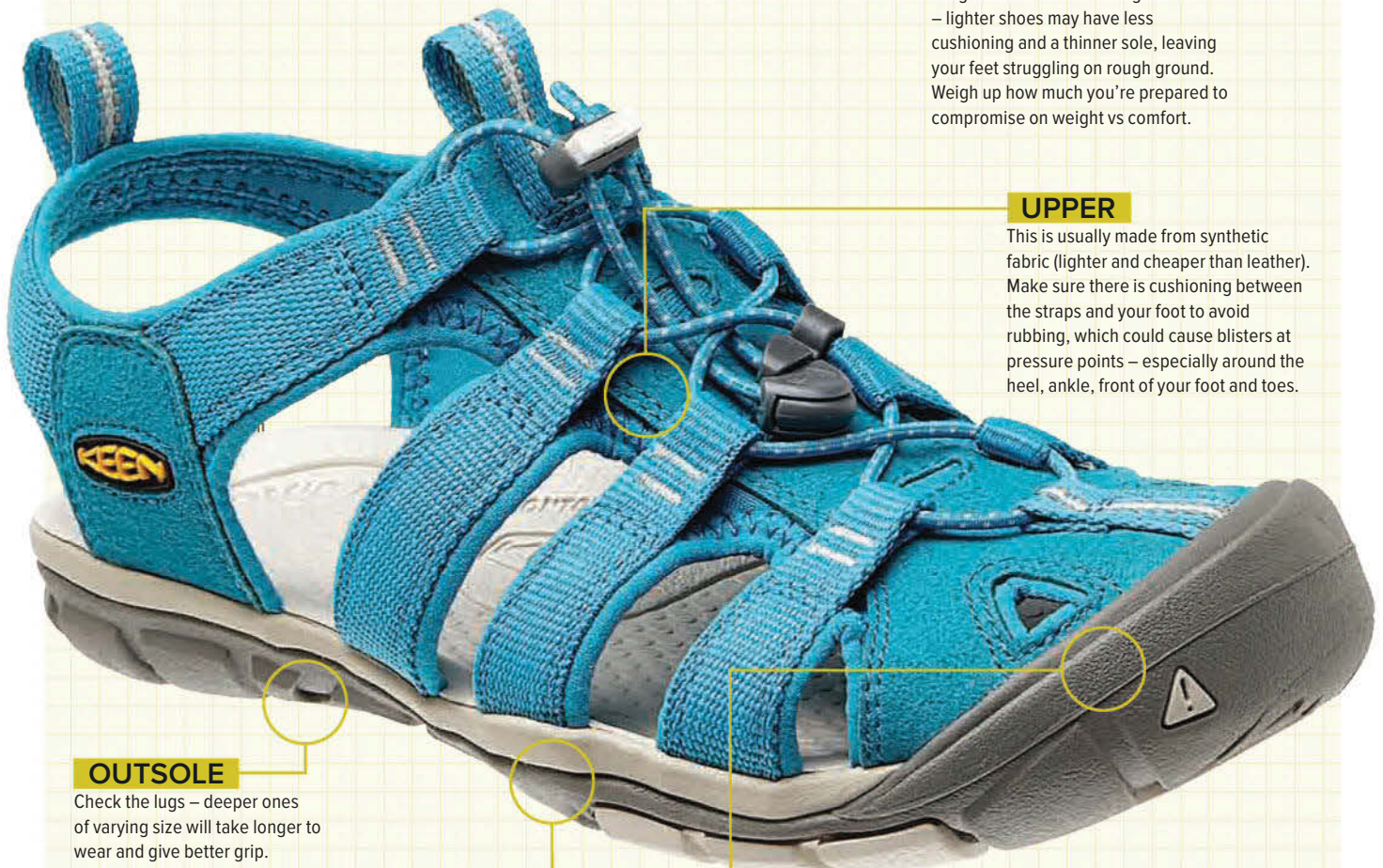
TOE PROTECTION

If you just want sandals for walking around towns or on beaches, toe protection may be unnecessary. However, if you want a more versatile option that you can wear for activities such as trail walking and kayaking, it's worth considering.



Featured sandal

The sandal pictured above is the Keen Clearwater CNX (£75), which is lightweight, versatile and built to protect your toes. For stockists and to see more products, visit www.keenfootwear.com



Sandals

We test out your essential travel kit, so you don't have to...



REGATTA

Ad-Flux II / Elektron £35

THE TEST: At first glance, this sandal looks fairly flat and appears to have the least-moulded footbed here, looking more flip-flop than activity sandal. However, turn it over and the outsole actually has a collection of well-spaced lugs to help with grip, proving it's built with walking in mind. Also, although the footbed isn't particularly shaped, it still offers a good amount of cushioning and flex.

It features two adjustable straps to help get a good fit. As someone with high-arched feet, I would have liked more support around the mid-foot, as it felt a bit loose; those with lower arches may not have a problem. The upper is made from mesh and spandex and is lined to be soft against the skin. At 474g (pair, women's UK size 6) these are the second-heaviest here, though at over 200g lighter than the heaviest, they're closer in weight to the lightest. There's no toe protection.

THE VERDICT: A definite step up from flip-flops, ideal for those needing low cost footwear for sightseeing and shorter walks.

IN BRIEF

Features: ★★★★★

Design: ★★★★★

Comfort: ★★★★★

Versatility: ★★★★★

Value: ★★★★★

Overall: ★★★★★

www.regatta.com



KARRIMOR

Saba £35 (w) £40 (m)

THE TEST: Offering a more moulded footbed than the Regattas, Karrimor's Saba is also made for walking. It features more arch support, a good amount of targeted cushioning (at the back and ball of the foot) and a slightly stiffer sole, which would be good for longer hikes. The outsole features a range of different-sized lugs, offering good grip. There are also three adjustable straps, which make the sandal feel more secure.

The upper is made from synthetic fabric, with targeted cushioning at key pressure points. I did find that the gaps in cushioning where the sandal's different sections met – over the toes and under the main strap – meant a bit of rubbing. These are the third-lightest on test (411g, pair, women's UK size 6). They offer no toe protection.

THE VERDICT: Despite costing a little more for men, these are well-priced, especially as they offer more features – a moulded insole, more adjusters. As long as they don't rub your feet, they're a good, low-priced option.

IN BRIEF

Features: ★★★★★

Design: ★★★★★

Comfort: ★★★★★

Versatility: ★★★★★

Value: ★★★★★

Overall: ★★★★★

www.karrimor.com



TEVA

Terra Fi 4 £65

THE TEST: Celebrating 30 years since their founder invented the first sports sandal, Teva are renowned for their comfort. As such these have a generous amount of cushioning. Built primarily for watersports, they also feature an impressively robust sole that's good for walking. From a shock-absorbing section at the back to the anatomical footbed (for excellent arch support), they don't skimp on comfort. There's also an aggressive set of lugs to help with grip. However, such a meaty sole adds weight: at 714g (pair, women's UK size 6), these are the heaviest on test by a way. They're also a bit clumpy for short strolls (though there is a lighter Terra Fi Lite option).

There's no toe protection but the big sole puts distance between toe and shoe end. The upper is synthetic, with two adjustable straps. There are pads of cushioning at key points but where they ended meant potential rubbing.

THE VERDICT: Heavy weight, but superb cushioning underfoot – ideal for water sports and longer walks, if the upper suits your foot.

IN BRIEF

Features: ★★★★★

Design: ★★★★★

Comfort: ★★★★★

Versatility: ★★★★★

Value: ★★★★★

Overall: ★★★★★

www.teva.co.uk



How we did the test...

We asked gear manufacturers to submit sandals that would be best suited for active travellers. From the ten pairs we were sent our editor, Phoebe Smith, took them out on the road to see which performed best. The six here are all 'Wanderlust Approved', with a Value Buy and Best in Test for the overall best buy, being indicated. All except one are available in men's and women's specific fits; the different names (or nearest equivalent) and prices are given if applicable.



ECCO

Kawaii / Offroad Lite

£75 (w) £85 (m)

THE TEST: With a leather upper and casual-wear style, the women's Kawaii (tested) could be worn for evenings out as well as easy walks. The two strap adjusters at the back enable a good fit there; however, there is no adjustment over the toes, leaving them loose in that area. A softer fabric on the inner helps prevent rubbing, but where there are gaps in this you may find they do chafe.

Underfoot there's a good amount of cushioning. The footbed is moulded, ensuring good support. The outsole features varying sized lugs to help with grip, though they're not as aggressive as some on test. The sole offers a good amount of stiffness and flex.

Weighing 392g (pair, women's size 6), these are the second-lightest on test. There is no direct men's equivalent, though for £10 more, Ecco offers the Offroad Lite (not tested).

THE VERDICT: Great for easy strolls and sightseeing if they fit you well, but active types may want something more versatile.

IN BRIEF

Features: ★★★★★

Design: ★★★★★

Comfort: ★★★★★

Versatility: ★★★★★

Value: ★★★★★

Overall: ★★★★★

Stocked by www.rohan.co.uk



VIVOBAREFOOT

Ultra £75

THE TEST: The Ultra is a three-in-one chameleon. Its inner sock (made from a swimsuit-type fabric) has a rubber sole, and can be worn alone as a water shoe. The outer shell can be worn on its own as a sandal, with great ventilation. Or you can wear the two together for a warmer shoe that's still completely amphibious. Secured to your foot by an adjustable cord, it fits well, both with and without the inner sock.

As the name suggests, Vivobarefoot is focused on helping you walk in the most 'natural' way: the sole is the thinnest on test, with little cushioning. If you're not used to barefoot footwear, you may struggle with these for walking long distances.

The lugs are not as aggressive as others on test but are well spaced and grip well. You also get toe protection. These are the lightest here – just 338g (pair, women's UK size 6).

THE VERDICT: One of the best options for water activities, though some will struggle to use them for walking longer distances.

IN BRIEF

Features: ★★★★★

Design: ★★★★★

Comfort: ★★★★★

Versatility: ★★★★★

Value: ★★★★★

Overall: ★★★★★

www.vivobarefoot.com/uk



KEEN

Clearwater CNX £75

THE TEST: These may be at the higher end of the price scale, but you get what you pay for. The anatomical footbed (handily anti-odour too) has a contoured arch and is instantly comfortable. The synthetic upper is lined all over, so no rubbing at pressure points. It's fitted to your foot via a cord system that's quick and easy to use.

Underfoot there's a good amount of cushioning – ample, if not as much as others on test. The sole is quite flexible so your feet may tire on longer, rougher walks, but the outsole is well designed with a variety of well-spaced lugs. The toe protection is superb; a rubber rand helps prevent knocks, making these feel more like a shoe that is well vented – ideal for warmer climates. At 444g (pair, women's UK size 6) it's the fourth-lightest on test and feels light on foot.

THE VERDICT: A great all-round sandal, that's well-featured and comfortable straight from the box. You can get a sporty sandal for less, but for versatility this is the best choice.

IN BRIEF

Features: ★★★★★

Design: ★★★★★

Comfort: ★★★★★

Versatility: ★★★★★

Value: ★★★★★

Overall: ★★★★★

www.keenfootwear.com



RED HOT SECRET

With its rosy sands, flaming cliffs, ruby-roofed lighthouses and red-headed girl, Prince Edward Island is the hot spot Canadians want to keep to themselves

WORDS **PHOEBE SMITH** PHOTOGRAPHS **NEIL S PRICE**





“We’re being torn apart and – eventually – if we don’t stop what we’re doing we will be swallowed up by the sea.” They were

alarming words, particularly coming from your kayak instructor when you’re both a fair way from land. Around me, however, all was calm. The water barely rippled, the surface so flat it was hard to know where sea stopped and sky began. An osprey soared silently overhead.

What Tim Nicholls was actually talking about wasn’t our current activity, but the land we were paddling around – the regally named red sandstone mass of Prince Edward Island, which sits in the Gulf of St Lawrence. When we’d set out from the small town of North Rustico – all bobbing tuna boats, snoozing skippers and primary-coloured rooftops glowing in the sun – everything had looked quite idyllic. But there’s trouble afoot on this isle: one study has estimated that the coast is being eroded at a rate of 28cm a year, due to higher sea levels caused by climate change. As we paddled toward the headland on the island’s north shore, there was evidence of the attrition: the nose of a giant red cliff lay cracked and slumped on the beach, the base broken like a crumbled cookie.

I gasped sympathetically, but Tim looked unconcerned. “At least it won’t cost much to update the name when we split into three or more,” he laughed, “they just need to add an ‘s’ – we’ll be Prince Edward Islands.”

With that he ran his hand through his matted, sun-bleached hair and smiled, every bit the laid-back sea dog. Born and raised in nearby Nova Scotia, he’s a holidaymaker who never went home. Nothing seemed to faze him; not the wake from a passenger ferry, not the pesky terns dive-bombing us from above, and certainly not the fact that his adopted home was shrinking before his eyes.

Yet this laid-back attitude was a real PEI trait. I’d encountered it the minute I landed – in everyone from the friendly airport security to the relaxed barista who’d made my coffee at breakfast. And here, bobbing along on the tranquil waters, eel grass hissing as it swept beneath my kayak’s hull, curious cormorants watching from atop fluorescent buoys and seagulls gathered around the mussel baskets, Tim’s calm attitude was infectious. It was a truly serene scene.

Birthplace of a nation

Kayaking is an apt way to explore PEI, but it certainly isn’t the only option. There’s the recently completed Confederation Trail, a 470km cycle route that crosses the island, tip to tip, utilising abandoned railway lines. And there’s also a well-established network of roadtrip routes, designed to showcase PEI’s extensive coastline.

Keen to discover more about the province where Canadians choose to holiday, I’d opted for a combination of both when I arrived in Charlottetown a few days earlier. The largest city on the island and capital of the province, it’s a sprawling small town. Working inwards, the malls and chain stores on its outskirts soon morph into the white picket fences of suburbia before reaching the Victorian-esque Downtown. Complete with horse-drawn carriages, quaint second-hand bookshops, chocolatiers, ice-cream parlours and independent clothing boutiques, it exudes a real nostalgia for a time gone by. ►

Garden of the Gulf
(clockwise from this)
Cormorants balance on
the buoys in North
Rustico; laid-back Tim
Nicholls of Outdoor
Expeditions; the
horse-drawn carriages
of Charlottetown; one
of PEI's many fishing
villages; (previous
page) the lighthouse
and red sands at Dalvay





Million acre farm
(clockwise from this)
 Agriculture is big industry on PEI – mainly grains, vegetables and potatoes; a statue of Canada's first president John A Macdonald graces the streets of Charlottetown, the place where modern day Canada was conceived; 'Anne' at Green Gables

'Leaving the other visitors at the house, I passed the afternoon wandering "Lover's Lane" and the "Haunted Woods", the places I'd read about in my childhood brought to life before my eyes'

◀ It's easy to dismiss Charlottetown as a pretty though fairly insignificant pinpoint on the country's map. But it was here, in 1864, amid the bunting and wooden houses, that the idea to create Canada as we know it today was born. It wasn't without some growing pains though, although now called the 'Gentle Island', PEI has had a fairly tumultuous history. First settled by the Mi'kmaq people, from the 18th century it saw a series of colonial invasions and battles between the French and British, and even a mini-invasion by a couple of Americans during the Revolutionary War.

Best things come in threes

Sunlight seeped through the windows as I picked up my hire car (complete with bike rack and bicycle) and headed north-east from Charlottetown to Greenwich, part of the Prince Edward Island National Park. With over 1,000km of coast, there was obviously a tricky decision to be made to decide which parts deserved official protection; as such there are three separate sections of national park along the north shore, and Greenwich is the furthest east.

This isn't PEI's only trio. If you look at a map, you'll notice – as chilled-out Tim pointed out – it easily divides into three: the eastern end, the central block and the west end. The road planners obviously spotted this too, and have designated three main scenic driving routes to showcase the best of the island: the Central Coastal Drive (divided into the northern Green Gables Shore and the southern Red Sands Shore); the North Cape Coastal Drive (in the west); and the Points East Coastal Drive – which I was now following. However, as I soon discovered, most roads in PEI could pass for scenic drives.

Stopping at Greenwich Visitor Centre I learned that the Mi'kmaq called the island *Abegweit*, which means 'cradled by the waves' or 'lying flat in water'. The flat bit sounded promising so I grabbed my bike and made for the car-free trails that lie within the national park boundary. I'd been told that this was a popular area for visitors but on two of the three trails I didn't meet another soul. As I looped round the wooden boardwalks and sandy tracks I mused how busy it might have been when the Mi'kmaq were here. Archaeological digs have unearthed relics dating back over 10,000 years, revealing it to be a gathering place. Now it was quiet except for the click of my pedals.

For the final trail to Greenwich Dunes I had to go on foot. As I plunged into woodland, I heard movement overhead. A red squirrel emerged, scuttled along a branch, eyed me suspiciously, then disappeared in a crimson flash. Elated by this sighting, I continued on to a reed-fringed pocket of water where I spied wild roses, bayberry and beach pea; a northern harrier watched on from a tree.

When I reached the dunes, the trail's namesake, there was only a handful of people there. The sand glowed with a pinky sheen and the long grass rustled lazily in the breeze. If I'd managed to find a popular spot so quiet on a sunny day in August, it was no wonder Canadians aren't keen to shout about this island sanctuary. Mesmerised by the serenity of this beautiful place, I wanted to check out the wilder side of the island, so I set a course for the little-visited North Cape.

Alone with Anne

Between Greenwich and the North Cape lay the Green Gables Shore, home to the other two sections of national park coastline – Dalway and Cavendish. Along the way the landscape seemed to grow greener. At Dalway I finally discovered the crowds so I continued on to North Rustico, where I met Tim and his kayaks and paddled beneath the copper-stained cliffs near Cavendish.

Sticking with the red theme I journeyed slightly inland to the place that gives the shoreline its name – Green Gables. It's here that author Lucy Maud Montgomery set her story of red-headed Anne Shirley, an orphan adopted by Marilla and Matthew Cuthbert at the eponymous Green Gables house. The book spawned many sequels, a film trilogy, a TV show and even Canada's longest-running musical – which is performed every year at the Charlottetown Festival. For many young girls (myself included), Anne put PEI firmly on their travel wishlists.

"Green Gables is like our version of Disneyland, but you have to go, it's sort of mandatory," Tim had told me. Worried that my imagined visions of this place would be ruined, it was with reluctance that I walked towards the famed house. In front stood 'Anne', a local girl dressed as the book's heroine, and my reluctance started to turn to regret. But then I discovered a number of nature walks, each one the inspiration for different narrative threads in Montgomery's tales. Leaving the other visitors at the house, I passed the afternoon wandering 'Lover's Lane' and the 'Haunted Woods', the places I'd read about in my childhood brought to life before my eyes. It left me in such high spirits that even the strip of Gables-themed giftshops, motels and car number plates lining the road out of town couldn't bring me down.

The wild west

Almost as soon as I'd passed the island's second city of Summerside, the landscape and people changed. Agriculture is the big industry here. Sandy beachfronts were replaced by rolling fields of vermilion-coloured soil. The fishing villages became more functional than pretty – the fishermen more interested in hauling their loot rather than offering boat rides to tourists – and the hamlets became increasingly small.

I stopped at Tignish Shore Beach, where there were no bathers, only a man picking seaweed. "Irish moss," he explained in an accent that sounded somehow different to those of the islanders in Charlottetown. "I gather it then sell it."

He went back to his picking and I looked a little closer; it was rubbery in texture. Around half the world's Irish moss comes from PEI. It's harvested for its carrageenan, used as a thickener and stabiliser in everything from shampoos and toothpaste to ale and ice cream. Collectors use horses to drag baskets through the shallow water where it gathers, but it also appears on the shore after storms.

I continued on to North Cape. As it's the most northerly point on PEI I'd expected to be greeted by a giant lighthouse. ▶

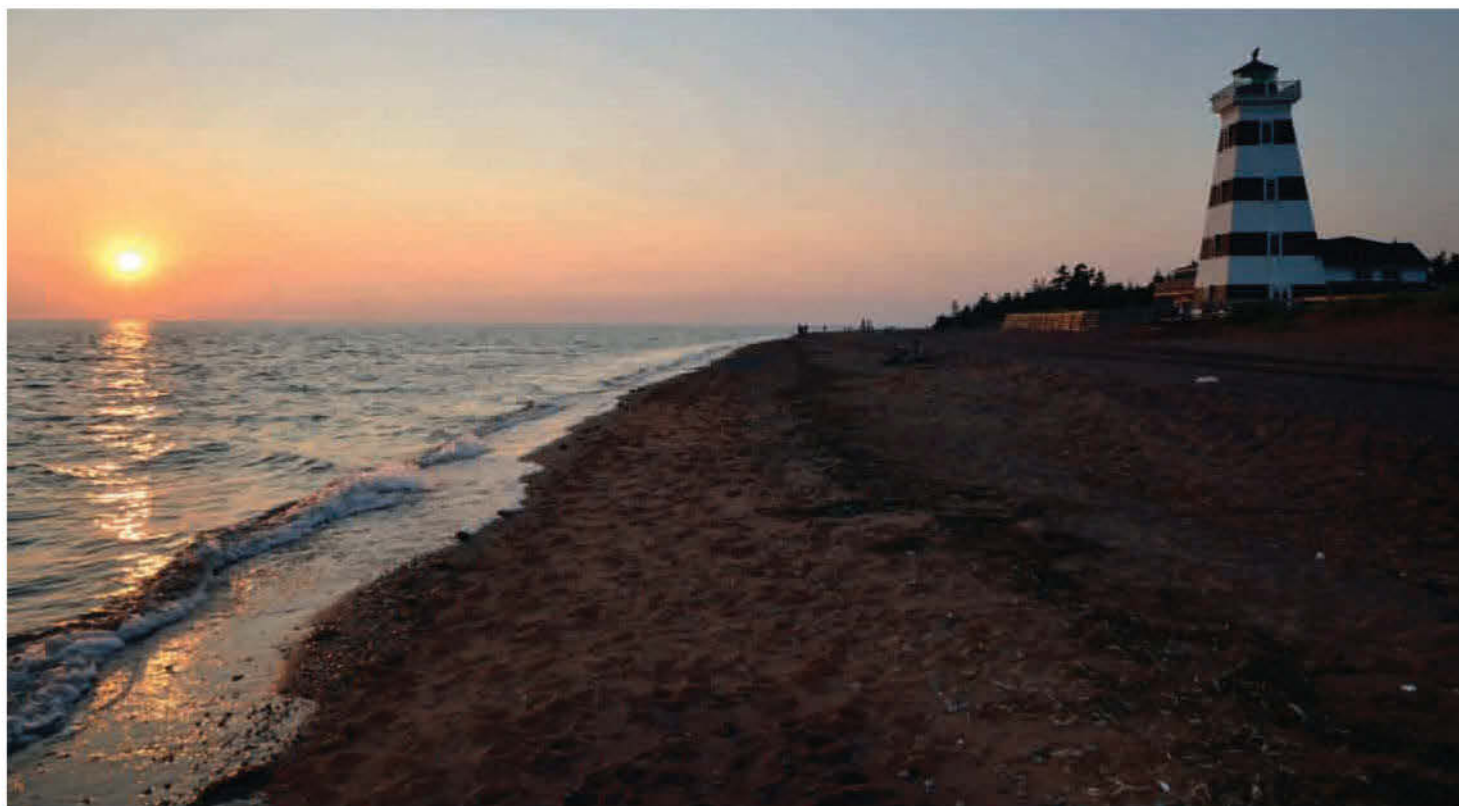




Squirrels, squalls and streams
Red squirrels, crumbling cliffs and multiple watercourses pepper PEI, while 63 lighthouses line the coast including West Point, North Cape and Victoria-by-the-Sea

Bikes and beyond...
The postcard-perfect
Victoria-by-the-Sea,
a great place to rest the
wheels; (right) sun sets
over atmospheric
West Point lighthouse





‘There are numerous ghost stories attached to this spot – from purported sightings of Lighthouse Willie to the apparition of the flaming phantom ship, which continues to burn after its ill-fated crew made a pact with the devil’

◀ Instead a wind turbine blade marked the spot (hiding a tiny lighthouse) along with a research station and a museum dedicated to the natural power being harnessed here. It was an indicator that problems with climate change are being addressed. And not before time: signs warned of the crumbling cliffs, which mixed with the sea, tinging the frothy wake blush pink. It was deliciously wild.

To the lighthouse

I may not have found the lighthouse I’d hoped for at North Cape but I made up for it that evening at West Point, where my accommodation for the night was a working lighthouse.

Situated on the westernmost part of the island – and an easy drive from the town of O’Leary and the Canadian Potato Museum in (yep, PEI has one of those too) – West Point Lighthouse was built in 1875 to warn seafarers of the vast reef that sits offshore. It’s one of 63 lighthouses on the island; over half are still active, though they’re all automated these days. West Point was manned until 1963, and had just two keepers, the first of which was William MacDonald (aka ‘Lighthouse Willie’) who, in his 50 years on duty, never had a single night off.

It was close to sunset as I climbed the steps to the top of West Point’s stripy tower. The deck was empty. The beam glowed an eerie shade of luminous green, turning on its endless cycle, its bright light slicing through the darkening waters. From here I could see the bronze silt sneaking its way north towards the

horizon; alongside I could make out the point where two tides collided, marking the end of the reef.

There are numerous ghost stories attached to this spot – from purported sightings of the aforementioned Lighthouse Willie, to the apparition of the flaming phantom ship, which continues to burn after its ill-fated crew made a pact with the devil.

Less fantastical was the tale about the islanders who tried to start a ferry service between here and the neighbouring province of New Brunswick. They weren’t successful, and now the only two ways on and off the island that don’t involve flying are the Confederation Bridge at Carleton and the ferry to Nova Scotia from Wood Islands. I’d see the former on my way back to Charlottetown the next day, along with fields of golden grain, honesty boxes offering home-grown potatoes and the postcard-perfect hamlet of Victoria-by-the-Sea. But right now, perhaps selfishly, I was glad that there was no link to the rest of the world from this remote point.

I wandered down to the secluded beach and stood, skimming stones, watching the sun sink below the water, turning the sand orange. I stood and watched the waves that are reshaping this landscape. But, much like Tim, I wasn’t going to worry about that right now. Instead, unlike lighthouse-keeper Willie, I was going to take a night off to just enjoy this beautiful island. 📷

Phoebe Smith is editor of Wanderlust magazine, she’s also author of several books including Extreme Sleeps: Adventures of a Wild Camper




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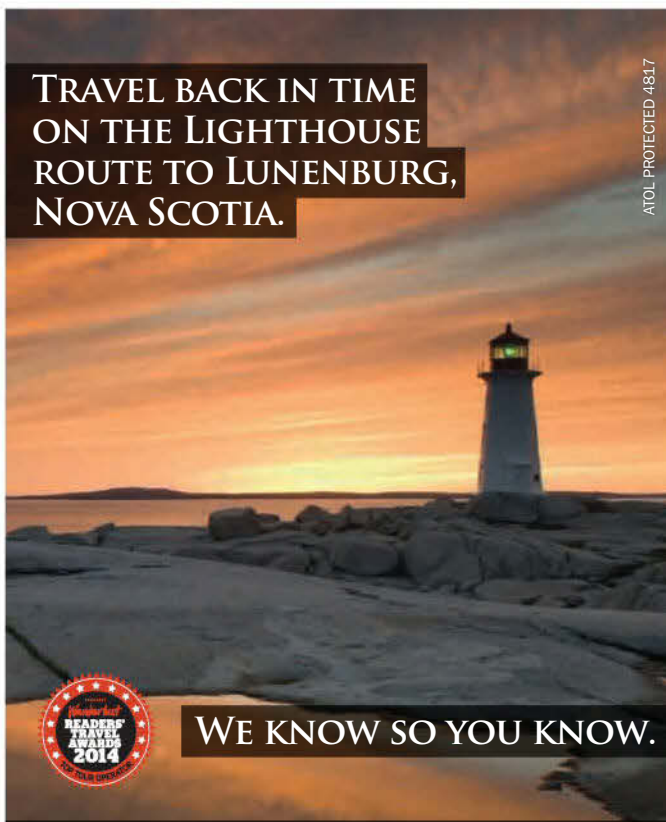



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FINDING YOUR PERFECT TRIP JUST GOT EASIER

Deciding where to go and what to do for your next adventure can be quite a challenge... and a lot of fun! Wanderlust has created a couple of brilliant new trip planning tools to help make the process a little bit easier

TRIP FINDER

Our Trip Finder tool searches a huge database of options from our directory of specialist tour operators:

- Choose your selected region, destination or activity
- Instantly see all relevant trips
- Click-through links to the exact page on the operator's website

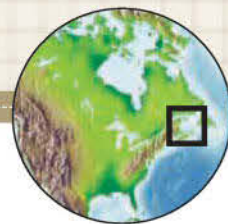
TRIP WIZARD

Let the tour operators do all your trip-planning legwork! Just define your preferred destinations, activities, budget, dates and must-see spots in the Trip Wizard and selected specialist tour operators will email you a custom itinerary.



Wanderlust

FOR MORE DETAILS VISIT:
www.mytripfinder.co.uk



Prince Edward Island, Canada Footnotes

VITAL STATISTICS

Capital: Charlottetown
Population: 145,855
Languages: English and French
Time: GMT-4 (March-Nov GMT-3)
International dialling code: +1
Visas: Not required by UK nationals
Money: Canadian dollar (C\$), currently around C\$1.85 to the UK£. Credit cards are widely accepted. ATMs are readily available in towns.

When to go

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec

■ **Spring & autumn** Cooler than summer but less crowded. Some snow can linger but shouldn't cause problems
 ■ **Summer** Dry and warm; rarely humid. Best time for activities (kayaking, walking, cycling)
 ■ **Winter** Coldest months; temperatures can drop below 0°C. Snow possible, though rarely effects roads

Health & safety

Comprehensive travel insurance is essential – local healthcare is excellent but expensive. Water is generally safe to drink, though drinking directly from lakes or rivers contaminated with animal faeces could cause the parasitic infection giardiasis (known in Canada as 'beaver fever'). Luckily giardiasis is easily treated with antibiotics.

Further reading & information

Nova Scotia, New Brunswick & Prince Edward Island (Lonely Planet, 2014)
Nova Scotia & Atlantic Canada (Fodor's, 2012)
Canada: The Maritime Provinces (Rough Guides Snapshot ebook, 2013)
Anne of Green Gables (1908) by LM Montgomery
www.tourismpei.com
www.atlanticcanadaholiday.co.uk

More online

Visit www.wanderlust.co.uk/146 for links to more content from the trip

ARCHIVE ARTICLES

- ◆ **Short Break: Halifax** – issue 136
- ◆ **Explore classic Canada** – issue 127
- ◆ **Iceberg hunting in Canada** – issue 100
- ◆ **PLANNING GUIDES**
- ◆ **Canada Travel Guide**

THE TRIP



Getting there

There are no direct flights to Prince Edward Island from the UK. There are **connecting flights to Charlottetown from several major Canadian airports**; the most common routes are via Halifax (Nova Scotia), Toronto (Ontario) or Montréal (Québec). The author travelled with Air Canada (0871 220 1111, www.aircanada.com) via Montréal. Prices start from around £700 return; journey time, including transfers, is about 13 hours.



Getting around

To get into town from Charlottetown Airport (www.flypei.com), board the T3 Airport & Winsloe Collector bus (ask for a transfer), which drops you off at the mall (C\$2.25 [£1.20]; 20 minutes; www.triustransit.ca). From there, catch either the City Loop or University Ave Express bus to Downtown, which takes a further 15-20 minutes.

However, **the easiest way to explore the island is to hire a car**. All the big hitters – Avis, Budget, Hertz, National – have branches at the airport.

Bike hire is a good idea, even if you've also rented a car. MacQueen's (430 Queen St, Charlottetown; www.macqueens.com) offers a range of bikes as well as helmets (mandatory) and vehicle bike-racks; bikes cost from C\$25 (£13.50) a day, C\$125 (£68) a week.



Accommodation

Choices range from boutique B&Bs to campsites, from hotels to lighthouses. **The Shipwright Inn** (Charlottetown; www.shipwrightinn.com) is the perfect base for exploring the capital – it's within walking distance of all the sights and offers free parking. Doubles from C\$99pn plus taxes.

West Point Inn and Museum (West Point; westpointharmony.ca) offers rooms below and in the lighthouse. Doubles from C\$150pn plus taxes.



Cost of travel

Prices in PEI are comparable with the UK. Petrol is far cheaper – currently around C\$1.38 (75p) a litre. Items and services are usually subject to tax, not included in advertised price. PEI has Harmonized Sales Tax (HST) of 14%.



Food & drink

Seafood is the order of the day. **Lobsters, oysters and shellfish** (celebrated at the annual Shellfish Festival; 18-21 September 2014) feature. Agriculture is a thriving industry, so expect **fresh local produce** – from potatoes to grains and *rutabaga* (swede). You must try the locally made **Cows ice-cream** and Cow Chips (chocolate-coated crisps).

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND HIGHLIGHTS



1 Anne of Green Gables: The Musical, Charlottetown

Having been performed at the summer Charlottetown Festival every year since 1965, this is the world's longest-running annual musical. If it's on at the theatre when you visit (the 2014 run is 1 July-24 September), go see it – but take tissues, it's a weepy.

2 Greenwich Dunes

Detour off the Points East Coastal Drive to explore this area's three easy cycle/walking trails, to look out for red squirrels and to find the uncrowded beach at the end.

3 Carleton Cove

Look out for the massive church near North Carleton, it offers ample parking and is the perfect place to take a photo of the iconic bridge over to New Brunswick.

4 North Cape

The island's northernmost tip is wild and uncrowded, and has a totally different vibe to the rest of PEI. Check out Black Marsh Nature Trail (5.5km, return) with its many interpretation panels, learn about wind power at the Atlantic Wind Test Site and eat great seafood.

5 Cavendish

You can't escape *Anne of Green Gables* here, so go with it: visit the house, follow a nature walk, stroll further to see where LM Montgomery lived and pay your respects at her final resting place.

6 Basin Head

Stroll along the Singing Sands to hear the grains squeak, a natural phenomenon caused by the high silica content.





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“Be a traveller, not a tourist. Go with the wind and open your mind to the unexpected.” This is the mantra of skipper Scott, one of the many experienced **G Adventures** sailors that guide voyagers past historic sights, amid secret archipelagos and across the glittering seas that cling to Europe's island-speckled shorelines.

Scott leads travellers of all skill levels around the secluded seas, tiny ports and flexible routes through destinations such as Croatia, Turkey and Greece. Are you an aspiring sailor? If so, you can literally learn the ropes as you go. Or, if you're a novice who'd rather sit back and immerse yourself in the culture and nature of your aquatic surroundings – that's just fine too. Think bold, adventurous days island-hopping

and coast-cruising, rounded off with relaxing nights mixing with your fellow travellers.

And in celebration of G Adventures' 25th year, you could be heading to one of the company's most exciting sailing destinations, Croatia.

Discover Dalmatia

Studded with 1,185 islands, Croatia's Dalmatian Coast makes for a great adventure. There's Brač's shard of weather-worn beaches, Korčula's 200 exploration-ripe caves and numerous hidden inlets. If you love to dive, you'll find the remains of World War 2 bombers off the island of Vis, while medieval broken bottles and pottery turn the seabed into an underwater history lesson.

Step off the boat and into the remarkable UNESCO World Heritage sites in Dubrovnik and

on Hvar, both serving up a collision of Gothic, Renaissance and Baroque architectures. Or if you're on a get-fit mission, you can trek through the emerald, forest-clad landscapes of Mljet National Park.

For those who can't get enough of those UNESCO icons, Diocletian's Palace in Split is filled with decadent design and remains the largest Roman building in the Adriatic. Built at the end of the 3rd century, this vast, atmospheric maze of lanes and squares now houses a labyrinthine shopping complex.

But while Croatia's island-scattered waters will give just one lucky winner a remarkable sailing experience, G Adventures have many other wind-powered wanderings for travellers to hoist their sails for...



Unravel Greek legends

Heroes, gods, monsters. Sailing the South Aegean will give you the chance to create your own Greek odyssey as you uncover local lore, mythology and rich history. With 220 islands, including mighty Mykonos and whitewashed Santorini, this archipelago offers plenty to see and do, amid some of the world's most beautiful sailing grounds.

Dine on fresh snapper as you glide through the crystalline waters with the wind in your sails. There's plenty going on underwater as well, so grab your snorkel kit and explore the islands' rocky landscapes: expect seagrasses, algae-covered rocks, sponges and corals. If you're lucky, bottlenose, striped and Risso's dolphins will swim alongside the boat, sometimes accompanied by a rogue pilot or sperm whale.

Head inland by day and you can hike the many trails of Sifnos, climb the Cyclades' tallest peak, Mount Zeus on Naxos, discover traditional wares in the markets of Syros, or spot Kéa's famous stone lion. The car-free air, ancient ruins and high hilltops of Hydra beckon too, as does a vertigo-inducing 'taxi' (donkey) ride.

As if all that isn't enough, the Cyclades are a stone's throw from the Greek capital of Athens, where you can delve headfirst into Antiquity, exploring ruins teetering from hillsides, and stroll through cobbled streets.

Cruise the Turkish riviera

If you're a laidback coastal cruiser, then there's the Turkish Riviera. Get comfortable on a 12m catamaran as it drifts past St Peter's Castle. The 15th century stronghold is now the Bodrum Museum of Underwater Archaeology, home to excavated shipwrecks and reconstructed vessels.

Sun worshippers will appreciate a stop-off at one of the sandy beaches of Datça, such as Taşlık Plaj, while the historic port of Bodrum and ruins of Knidos will satisfy the most demanding of culture vultures. Begin or conclude your journey in the time-warp town of Fethiye too – a modern hub built atop the ancient city of Telmessos, founded in 5th Century and once a key metropolis.

But it's probably the 36 haunting rock tombs of Dalyan, cut into the craggy facades of sheer cliffs, that are most likely to etch themselves on your memory, rivalled only by a glimpse of the

endangered loggerhead sea turtle. These make their home at a WWF reserve in Ciralı.

So, whether you win a sailing trip to Croatia or are booking to visit Greece or Turkey, you'll find that taking a G Adventures cultural cruise isn't just a sail into a sun-flared horizon, but a trip back in time too. Bon voyage!

How to enter

G Adventures is offering one lucky *Wanderlust* reader the chance to win a sailing trip in Croatia.

To enter, simply answer the following:

Q What year did Bruce Poon Tip start G Adventures?

- a) 1980
- b) 1985
- c) 1990

To enter, and for full terms & conditions, visit www.wanderlust.co.uk/competitions or send your answer, name and contact info on a postcard to the *Wanderlust* office (p2). Closing dates for entries is 21 May 2014. State 'no offers' if you'd rather not be contacted by *Wanderlust* or the sponsors.

For more information go to www.gadventures.com

WALKING AT WORLD'S END

El Hierro, once thought to be where the planet stopped, is the Canary Islands' explosive little secret – and now a new network of trails is opening it up to hikers

WORDS **MARTIN SYMINGTON**







Under the volcano
El Hierro bears the scars of its eruptive past, from the barren Nisdafe Plateau to the lava fields near La Restinga (right)

Lobito would show me the way. The fudge-coloured mutt with a question mark tail had been my companion, on and off, for much of my day's hike. He first padded up to me out on the Nisdafe plateau while, to a backdrop of exploded volcano craters, I sat munching my midday sandwich of smoky morcilla sausage. I later learned his name from a shepherdess who yelled at him to keep away from her sheep-dog bitch. Lobito (which means 'little wolf') was, she divulged to me in Spanish, hands on hips, "...a Don Juan... forever on amorous adventures, if you understand me. Just like my nephew in Mocanal, his owner."

I next met Lobito when he emerged from the undergrowth while I was looking for the trail through pine woods to Mocanal village, just west of the island's 'capital' Valverde. Calculating that he must be making his gratified way home, I followed the question mark down a lava-paved mule track. Sure enough Libido (as I could not help re-christening him) showed me the way.

In truth, orientation on the island of El Hierro is fairly simple. One thing that had lured me to the smallest, furthest-south, furthest-west, often-forgotten and least-visited of the seven Canaries, was the *Red de Senderos* – a new network of themed hiking trails. These have been waymarked and well-mapped over the past couple of years by local tourism authorities. El Hierro has no beaches (unless you count a couple of stony black crescents), no resorts or hotels with more than a handful of rooms, negligible nightlife and a general dearth of other mainstream holiday enticements, so the idea is to attract low-volume niche markets such as walkers and nature lovers. The

fact that the island is not particularly easy to reach is put forward as a plus point.


There are two ways of getting here: a three-hour ferry ride from Tenerife's lager-and-chips-infested Los Cristianos; or a propeller-plane hop from Tenerife North airport near Santa Cruz (an hour by bus from the larger Tenerife South, where international flights arrive). I went for the latter option, finding even before we landed that the island packs a dramatic punch.

Virgin territory

It was lava at first sight. Through my plane window the lonely chunk of serrated grey, draped with a ragged green shawl, appeared adrift in the white-capped Atlantic Ocean. Smaller than the Isle of Wight with a population of just 11,000, El Hierro soars to a volcanic cone higher than Ben Nevis. In the days when the world was flat, this was the westernmost speck you could sail to without spilling over the edge.

Columbus weighed anchor from here before discovering America, and as long ago as AD150 Greek sage Ptolemy declared it the cartographic prime meridian. Amazingly, it remained so until 1884 when, at a convention in Washington, Greenwich grabbed the honour of being zero degrees longitude.

From the toy-sized airport next to the north-eastern coastline, I took a taxi up to Valverde, a one-horse town of white houses tumbling down a hillside like builders' rubble. There are no traffic lights, and few buildings more than two stories high, but I found a 'fashion boutique' claiming to be 'for men and women, boys and girls'; a barber ('speciality: haircuts!'); and last but not least a mini-market selling crumbly *queso herreño* cheese and the morcilla blood sausage that was to sustain me on my rambles. ►



‘In the days when the world was flat, this was the westernmost speck you could sail to without spilling over the edge’



‘Pineapples, bananas, vines and almonds thrive on the El Golfo floor where most of El Hierro’s population live – along with the critically endangered El Hierro giant lizard’

◀ El Hierro’s hiking trails overlap and intersect, not really lending themselves to a single round-the-island itinerary. So, although I moved between a trio of small hotels, I found that the way to make the most of my week was to plot a daily route dipping in and out of more than one path. To this end, I called taxis to drop or pick me up and soon made friends with always-reliable Carlos Carreras, a great-grandfather and proud owner of the canary-yellow Mercedes 280SE that he bought in 1974 and now has a million kilometres on the clock.

“Walking? When I was young you went on foot if you were too poor for a donkey,” Carlos mused wryly.

From Valverde I followed a stretch of the Camino de la Virgen, guided by bold red lettering on wooden guideposts as I climbed through patches of prickly pear and fig orchards, up to the crater-pocked Nisadef plateau. Birds of prey – probably Canarian buzzards – wheeled overhead while I snaked through the bleak tracery of crumbling stone walls protecting abandoned, stony plots. Typically, these were left behind by the thousands of Herreños forced by famine to seek their fortunes in Cuba during the early years of the 20th century. In later decades, thousands more left for oil-rich Venezuela.

While the waymarking of this trail is recent, the human tracks it follows are much older. An El Hierro legend tells of a ship bound for the New World in 1546, mysteriously becalmed with the sailors

forced ashore to beg for food. In gratitude they presented their hosts with a statue of the Virgin Mary, whereupon up whipped the wind and off they scooted. Awestruck by the Virgin’s power, the islanders built her the La Dehesa mountaintop chapel on the western side of the island, where the statue is still venerated. Once every four years she is paraded the length of the island by thousands of penitents – many of them emigrants returning to their ancestral home for an event. Apparently singing, dancing and drinking form part of the penance.

The next of these *bajadas de la virgen* pilgrimages is not until 2017, so for me this trail was more wilderness walk than hair-shirted knees up. I puffed up to 1,501m Malpaso, El Hierro’s highest point, among a string of rival crests and crater rims. From here an expansive view unfurled across the wind-harassed sea to the neighbouring volcano-tip islands of La Palma and La Gomera.

Around of Golfo

The scenic drama ratcheted up further when I reached the cliffs of El Risco, which fall not to the sea but to El Golfo, the flat, green, lowland semi-circle that now occupies El Hierro’s north-west shoulder and looks as if it has been pawed out of the mountain. Only when I stood on the lip could I begin to imagine the cataclysmic collapse of the crater some 50,000 years ago (the twinkling of an eye in geological time) when a third of the island crashed into the ►



Tails & trails
The El Hierro giant lizard (*left*) was thought extinct until 1974; wooden paths meander through El Golfo bay



Wild isle

(Clockwise from top left) Juniper trees bend to the wind; El Hierro's dramatic coast has no real beaches; the new trail network is well marked; pineapples flourish at El Golfo



◀ Atlantic. The resulting tsunami, perhaps 100m high, would have pounded the eastern seaboard of North and South America.

Pineapples, bananas, vines and almonds thrive on the El Golfo floor where most of El Hierro's population live – along with the critically endangered El Hierro giant lizard. These reptiles can grow to more than a metre long and had been thought extinct when in 1974 a German naturalist discovered a surviving colony living in the crater wall. However, the only ones I came across were at the Lagartario, in the village of Guinea, where they are bred in a greenhouse, for release.

Something that was dawning on me by degrees was how Latin American – as opposed to Spanish – El Hierro feels. Partly, this is the influence of returned emigrants: for instance, the minibuses connecting villages are known here as *guaguas* (pronounced 'wah-wahs') as they are in Caracas; and *arroz a la cubana* (rice with fried eggs and tomato sauce) is ubiquitous on menus. But I was also discovering that El Hierro's remoteness protects some traditional Canarian ways that have been lost or diluted elsewhere in the tourist-swamped archipelago.

The El Golfo village of Sabinosa, where I spent an evening, could be in colonial Colombia with its courtyards and balconied houses compressed into a cliff. I was a guest at Señora Noli Casañas' Casa de Comida where she offers (by prior arrangement only, this is her home not a restaurant) traditional Herreño hospitality. With three others I sat around her front room table scoffing *gofio*, the local staple of mushy maize meal with vegetables, and a jug of rough justice in the form of local Baboso Negro red wine.

Our hostess told us: "We Canarians are settlers, same as our cousins who went further across the Atlantic to America after leaving 'La Peninsula.'" The latter term is a mildly derogatory

reference to mainland Spain, which I have also heard used in South America.

Still, human habitation here goes back centuries before the Europeans, who first settled on El Hierro in the 15th century. This is evidenced by petroglyphs engraved by the Bimbaches (the Canaries' original inhabitants) on rocks above the lava-scaped pools of La Caleta, near the airport. Archaeologists have failed to decipher their meaning, or even agree on when the Bimbaches arrived and where they came from. However, along with their rock art, scraps of mythology have survived the familiar story of a people wiped out by violence, disease and sale into slavery.

One of these myths surrounds a sacred 15m-tall Garoé tree, worshipped by the Bimbaches on account of its ability to distil water on its leaves. In fact, the phenomenon of water condensing on trees and plants as mist disperses is not all that rare but, on an island where people have always had to struggle for water, the tree has become an emblem. The spot near San Andres, to the island's north, where the tree (not the original obviously, but who cares) shades a cool, clear pool still felt touched by magic.

Boiling point

I stopped by the Garoé tree to eat my sandwich, on a day when I wove in and out of another themed hiking trail, the Ruta del Agua. I had traced this 'water route' along culverts and trenches contouring around mountains as they channel streams to otherwise waterless *fincas* (farmsteads). Herreños, I was learning, still fight a perennial battle with rain that disappears into the porous, volcanic rock. This is a consequence of being the baby of the Canaries in age as well as size, having erupted from the ocean floor a mere million years ago. The other Canaries are between 12 and 20 times older. ►

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Rock on
The Roque de la Bonanza looms off the east coast and has become a symbol of the island



'I felt like an ant on the crumpled flank of an elephant as I crunched over twisted black rock and imagined the colossal tongue of surging magma'

◀ I felt neither a rumble nor a shake during my week there, but El Hierro is still prone to a spot of volcanic and seismic activity. The most recent was between September and November 2011 when a successions of tremors was followed by a fissure cracking open on the seabed off the southern tip. The Atlantic's surface fizzed and the fishing port of La Restinga was evacuated.

"Fish were leaping out of the sea ready cooked," joked (I think!) Paolo Cossovel, a Restinga resident who was one of my fellow diners in Sabinosa.

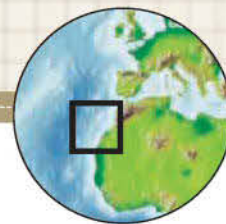
On this occasion the planet decided against cataclysm, and serenity was restored by Christmas. Nevertheless, a final day's hike across the south-west of the island ended with a lesson in just how restless the world is out at its edge.

Starting with the knee-straining ascent of a transhumance path – an old track used for driving livestock up to summer pastures – I reached the uplands of El Sabinar. These wilds may provide good grazing, but so exposed are they that the only trees to thrive are sabinas, the resilient and adaptable wild junipers bent double by prevailing westerlies. The wind was more accommodating with me, stilling to barely a breath, but something eerie remained about these natural sculptures with twisted silver trunks and branches hairy with lichen. They looked like mythological figures bowing to wash their tresses.

The landscape changed dramatically again as I dropped to the badlands of La Dehesa, the violent scene of the island's most recent major eruption, in 1793. I felt like an ant on the crumpled flank of an elephant as I crunched over twisted black rock and imagined the colossal tongue of surging magma. Reaching the sea, it solidified into bizarre black arches, pillars, natural bridges and outcrops like cathedral spires or hooked noses.

These rock stars were to provide the main act in my final evening's entertainment. With a local brandy in hand and by the light of a half moon, I sat on the terrace of the Pozo de la Salud hotel tuning in to the pounding beat of breakers. I watched surf turn to smoke as waves battered the otherworldly shapes they have been sculpting for two centuries. The forgotten island at the edge of the world does, I decided, do nightlife after all. 🍷

Martin Symington is a travel writer and author of the Bradt guide to Sacred Britain



El Hierro, Canary Islands Footnotes

VITAL STATISTICS

Main town: Valverde
Island population: 11,000
Language: Spanish
Time: GMT (Mar-Oct GMT+1)
International dialling code: +34
Visas: Not required by UK nationals
Money: Euro (€), currently €1.2 to the UK£. ATMs are plentiful.

When to go

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec

■ **Spring and autumn:** the best times for hiking. Agreeably warm, clear and likely to be dry
 ■ **Winter:** also good for walking, but coastal temperatures dropping to around 17-19°C and a higher chance of rain or fog
 ■ **Summer** – hot for hiking, though still an option

Health & safety
 Health care is good. EU citizens should carry their European Health Insurance Card (EHIC). Tap water is safe to drink. Take a hat and apply plenty of sun screen.

Further reading & information
Landscapes of La Palma and El Hierro (Sunflower Books, 2010) by Noel Rochford suggests touring and hiking routes complete with directions and maps.
Walking on La Gomera and El Hierro (Cicerone, 2010)
Kompass 242 El Hierro is the key road and hiking route map, for sale in Valverde and at the airport. **El Hierro Red de Senderos**, available free from the tourist office in Valverde and at some hotels, is also useful.
elhierro.travel/en Official tourism site
www.turismodecanarias.com

More online
 Visit www.wanderlust.co.uk/146 for links to more content from the trip
ARCHIVE ARTICLES
 ♦ Offbeat Ibiza – issue 127
 ♦ A pilgrim's progress along the Camino de Santiago – issue 119
 ♦ A walking weekend in Mallorca – issue 92
PLANNING GUIDES
 ♦ Spain travel guide

THE TRIP

A couple of tour operators feature El Hierro: **New Experience Holidays** (01824 710320, www.newex.co.uk) and **Inntravel** (01653 617000, www.inntravel.co.uk) both offer self-guided hotel-to-hotel hiking holidays. The latter offers *El Hierro – The Last Outpost* trip from £798pp based on two sharing including return flights from Tenerife North to El Hierro, 7 nights' B&B, 5 dinners, 3 picnics, luggage transfers between hotels, and walking route maps. International flights are extra.
Cachet Travel (020 8847 8700, www.cachet-travel.co.uk) organises hotel stays.

Getting there
 There are no flights to El Hierro from outside the Canaries. Numerous airlines, both scheduled and charters (on which seat-only deals can be found), fly to **Tenerife South** from airports all over the UK. Gatwick to Tenerife costs from £139 with British Airways (0844 493 0787, www.ba.com); flight time is around 4.5 hours.

Binter Canarias (www.bintercanarias.com) flies from Tenerife North to El Hierro; returns cost from €72 and flight time is 40 minutes. You can connect between Tenerife's two airports on the **343 bus**, which takes around 50 minutes and costs €10.
 The other option is to take the **Naviera Armas ferry** (+34 928 300600 from UK, 902 456500 from Spain, www.navieraarmas.com). This runs from Los Cristianos in the south of Tenerife to El Hierro; returns cost from €42 and take 2 hours 45 minutes.

In either case, it is best to fly to Tenerife South as early as possible in the day, so you have time to reach El Hierro the same day.

Getting around
 The most rewarding way to get around is **on foot**, but this is more enjoyable if you use wheels to get to and from some of the start and end points. While buses connect villages, you will also need **taxis**; I found them reasonably cheap, quick to arrive, and easy to reach with good mobile networks all over the island. Use the **taxi cooperatives** in Valverde (+34 922 551175) and Frontera (+34 922 559129).

Cost of travel
 There are few opportunities to flash the cash in El Hierro, and the island is **less expensive** across the board (hotels, restaurants, taxis) than its fellow Canaries or mainland Spain. Expect to pay around £20pp for a three-course meal with a beer or local wine.

Accommodation
 The two-star **Villa El Mocanal** (+34 922 55 03 73, www.villaelmocanal.com) is 5km from Valverde and 15km from the airport. Simple doubles cost from €42.
 The three-star **Pozo de la Salud** near Sabinosa (+34 922 559561, hotelbalneariopozodelasalud@gmail.com) is right by the ocean and has doubles from €60.
 The modern, comfortable **Parador El Hierro** (020 3318 9607, www.paradors.net) is right on the beach, and backed by volcanoes. Doubles from €82.

Food & drink
 Big, bold Herreño dishes and wines make up in character what they lack in delicacy. **Fish** and the local speciality **lapas a la plancha** (grilled limpets) are excellent. So too are **quesadillas**: sweet cheesy cakes. Even more traditional is **gofio** (maize meal) with vegetables and/or meaty stews. To book the Casa de Comida in Sabinosa, phone +34 678 350300.



EL HIERRO HIGHLIGHTS

- Malpaso Peak** Climb past the 1,500m mark to the highest point on the island for commanding views across the sea to the Western Canaries.
- Mirador de la Peña** Look-out point and restaurant designed by Lanzarote artist César Manrique in a jaw-dropping location on the cliff edge above the full sweep of El Golfo bay.
- Sacred garoé tree** Stop for lunch at this enchanted spot on the Ruta del Agua. Bathe your face in the cool, clear pool and, surprisingly, check your emails – the tiny shop at the entrance has free Wi-Fi.
- La Dehesa** This bizarre moonscape of solidified lava, with a wave-pounded fringe of otherworldly rock formations, is the result of a huge volcanic eruption in 1793.
- El Sabinar** See fairytale creatures in arboreal form – these wild juniper trees have bent and bowed to the wind, but remain undefeated out on the wild plain.
- La Restinga** Laid-back (unless there's an underwater eruption...) fishing village on the southern tip. Eat great seafood in the simple restaurants sprinkled round the harbour.



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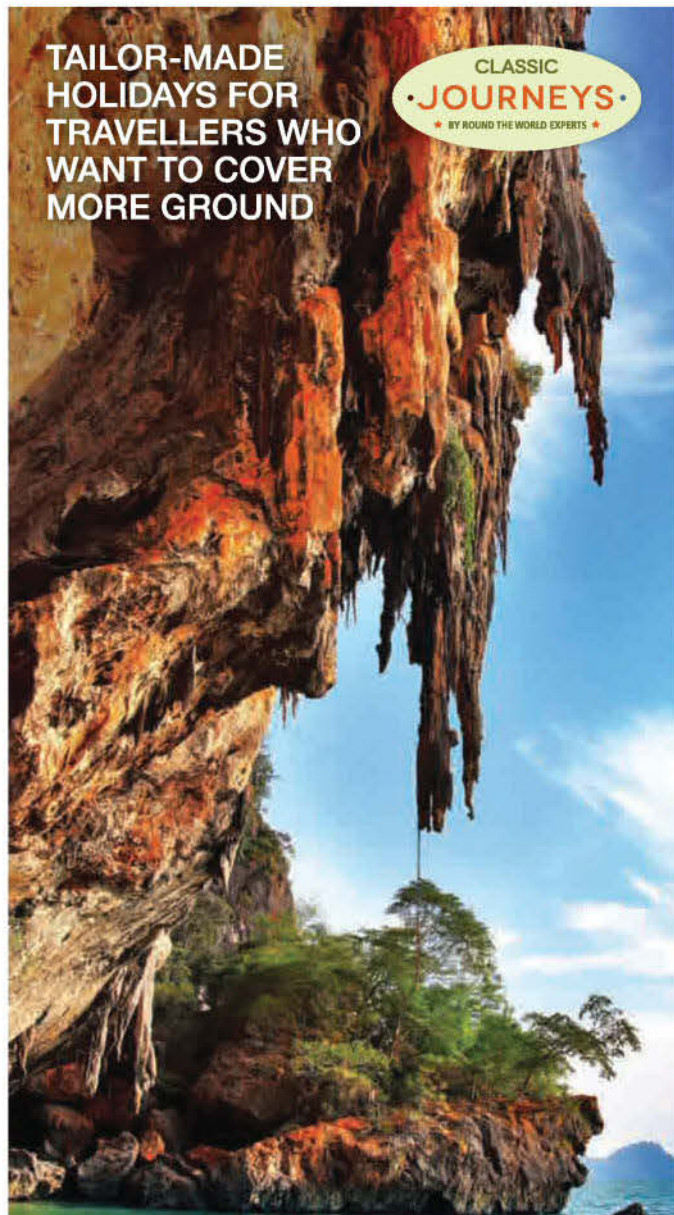
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FROM THE ROAD

Letters, tips, photos & exploits from you, our endlessly adventurous readers

The bow of our skiff split the blue of Inle Lake, the cloud-speckled sky reflected in the clear water. From behind me I could hear the roar of the Chinese diesel engine mounted on the long propeller shaft. We were on our way to what sounded like a Burmese tourist trap: "This morning we shall visit the cheroot-making factory," our guide had announced.

We drew in at the jetty of a rattan-and-bamboo building on stilts sunk into the lake bed. Well, it was a bit of a tourist trap but one of the better sorts.

It was more of a cheroot showroom with a demonstration. Attractive young women sat rolling cheroots, not – as the old men might have wished – on their thighs, but on tapered wooden rods. Their children played around them and the women combined cheroot rolling and childcare with nonchalant ease.

The Burmese passion for cheroots [cylindrical cigars] was one of my reasons for visiting Myanmar in the first place. I had memorised Kipling's 'Mandalay' and had a picture in my mind of his Burma girl: '*An' I seed her first a-smokin' of a whackin' white cheroot / An' a-wastin' Christian kisses on an 'eathen idol's foot*'.

The showroom probably doesn't get many smokers as visitors but I enjoy cigars occasionally and fellow tourist Richard turned out to be a serious cigar man.

They gave us tiny, aniseed-flavoured cheroots to try. They were fragrant and mild. They were fun to smoke. My wife tried one too. We bought a few, and then a bamboo and lacquer humidor-full, to delight our family at Christmas.

■ Your Story

The founding of the Threepenny Cheroot Club of Burma

The way into
local culture lies
within a loosely
packed cigar says
reader **David Higham**



Richard and I soon discovered that, in the markets, fat bundles of cheroots were for sale. They varied from tiny ones, smaller than a cigarette, to fat, black cigars. They varied in colour from green through brown to dark tar. The amount demanded in Burmese currency was so small it took us some time to work out that a fine cheroot cost about threepence.

A couple of evenings later we were anchored in the Ayeyarwaddy River off Mandalay. It was a hot, humid evening and dinner was over. Richard and I sat at the stern trying our selection of cheroots. John, an expansively jovial New Zealander, approached, drawn by the aromatic smoke. He turned out to be another lover of cigars. We offered him a smoke and he sat down with us. And so the Threepenny Cheroot Club of Burma had formed.

John drew enthusiastically on a large but loosely packed stogie and was immediately enveloped in a shower of sparks. He yelped in pain; that will teach him to wear shorts. He never really got the hang of Burmese cheroots and was to entertain us to a nightly conflagration.

Then it all got a bit competitive. Every time we went ashore, the members of the



Fag? Or firework?
Some of Burma's cheroots are more smokable than others

Threepenny Cheroot Club sought to outdo each other, all aiming to find the biggest or the cheapest cheroots. We had already found that a gas lighter cost 200 kyats (about 13p); in Magwe I found I could buy a lighter for half that. The difference between a 100-kyat lighter and a 200-kyat lighter is that the latter actually produces a flame.

After this excursion, there followed another very companionable evening of shooting the breeze as our smoke drifted over the Ayeyarwaddy. Which only spurred us towards further cheroot-buying adventures. Ashore the next day, I found a white-tipped yellow cheroot – or, with its twist of leaves at one end, it might have been a firework. It was about a foot long; four of them set me back nearly £2.

That evening, I produced my corn-leaf cheroots and John proudly presented

a whackin' white cheroot. But it was smaller than mine. With some experimentation and difficulty, we got them to light. This time we were both covered in a shower of burning leaf fragments. After about three drags on what he now knew to be a corn-leaf cheroot, John declared it unsmokable and stubbed it out. His problem was that he had bought 20 of the beasts.

I lasted a little longer and managed about half of mine: in flavour and sensation, it was like standing too close to a bonfire.

John and I found that the remainder of our purchases made welcome additions to tips for horse and cart drivers. From then on, our smoking habits were less bold. I found a small green cheroot that tapered gently from mouth end to fire end. The band simply called it "Special", and so it was. More evenings of smoke and talking man rubbish followed until our last night on board.

That night my wife joined us, and we admitted female members immediately. Fuelled, it has to be said, by a certain amount of claret, and to universal admiration, she managed to smoke three of the aniseed cheroots. John ended our last meeting by falling asleep with a cheroot still stuck in his mouth, which gently cascaded fire down his front. He looked so content; we had not the heart to wake him. That is until his wife Dawn came up like thunder and told him it was time for bed.

Will the Threepenny Cheroot Club of Burma meet again? Probably not. But our memories still drift in the smoke over the Ayeyarwaddy to the sound of tinkling temple bells.

Have you had an amazing travel experience? Post it online for a chance to feature here:
wanderlust.co.uk/mywanderlust ▶



LETTERS

Your mail and missives: this issue, getting irritated about all-inclusive travel; pet peeves about visas; the lack of typhoid jabs and more...

◀ Revive 'real' travel

The older I get, the more despondent I become about mass tourism. It seems the majority of British tourists enjoy being somewhere where the weather is hotter than in the UK but otherwise is very like home, with people who speak the same language, eat the same food and enjoy the same entertainment.

They are happiest in all-inclusive resorts where they can eat, drink and laze around the pool all day without venturing out for the duration of their stay. They don't seem interested in learning about the country's culture or history, and seldom attempt to interact with its inhabitants. They return home with a nice tan but very little knowledge of where they've just visited. Don't get me started about people who claim to see the world by cruise: homogenous tourism at its worst.

But each month a shaft of light dispels the gloom. I read my issue of *Wanderlust* and realise that there are still genuine travellers out there – like-minded, adventurous people who seek out new experiences and let their wanderlust take them off the beaten track to places seldom touched by big tour operators. In fact, your circulation figures suggest that the number may be increasing. If so, hats off – and keep up the good work.

Mike Horgan, Wirral

Typhoid troubles

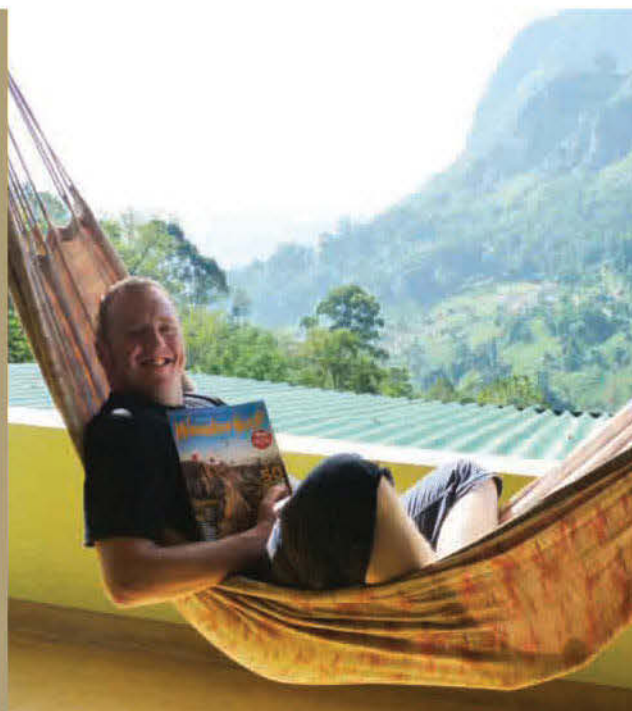
As I flicked through the new issue [March 2014, issue 145], the letter about the shortage of

★ STAR LETTER ★ Great minds think alike

The February edition of *Wanderlust* arrived two weeks before our trip to Sri Lanka and, having subscribed for years, I decided now was the time to enter the 'Where Does Your Wanderlust Take You' section. I resisted the temptation to dip into it before our trip and tucked it safely away in my luggage. It arrived unscathed and then the question arose of where to actually take the picture...

Then we reached the beautiful village of Ella. I had still not read a word, so I climbed into the hammock and my wife happily snapped a few shots with the Ella Gap as the backdrop. Imagine my horror five minutes later when I reached p13 to find Jonathan Levell had beaten me to the idea!

James Kirkin, Warrington



typhoid vaccine caught my eye. I had the same problem last year, so the shortage is lasting a while! I travelled anyway.

Suzanne Arnold, Surrey

No ID, no entry

As always I was very happy when my copy of *Wanderlust* came through the post. I was smiling to see an article on New York [April 2014, issue 146], having just come back from there on my honeymoon with my wife and son (five months). A great article but I just wanted to add to the Statue of Liberty crown access.

First, take ID. They need photo ID to match the name on the ticket, kids included. People who had paid were turned away without it. Second, kids under a year old can not access the crown

but can go up to pedestal.

Keep up the good work.
Iain Roswell, via email

Visa annoyances

In response to the news story ['Visa's won't stop you travelling', April 2014, issue 146] visas can be an asset. Australia and the USA's ESTA, are free or cheap and ease arrival formalities. But for countries with bureaucratic nausea, visas must be a deterrent. Most of us have choices. Japan (easy) or China (grim)? Malaysia (easy) or India (awful)?

My personal visa hates are Russia, India and China, all ridiculously expensive, with sheets of crazy questions. I've been to all these places more than once. But not again. Ever.
Rolf Richardson, Henley

WIN WANDERLUST GOODIES

Each issue, our winning contribution wins a haul of *Wanderlust* gear. This time around, congratulations to James!



■ Experiences JUST BACK FROM...



Goa, India
Trish Jasinski
spent a week
discovering this
multicultural melting pot

The highlight: Stopping at a roadside stand for a freshly prepared coconut water to go. We drove up and the guy sliced a few chunks off the top of the coconut and stuck a straw in it. Further down the road, another guy took my empty coconut, chopped some more and scooped out the creamy middle – tasty!

Must see: Baga beach seems to be where all the action is in terms of restaurants and nightlife – worth a visit. Old



Goa is nice as well; loved the Portuguese architecture.

Top tip: Fasten your seatbelt! Leave driving to the locals.

Cautionary tale: Mosquitos, inside as well as outside – don't forget the bug spray.

I wish I'd known... We struggled to find a working ATM at one point – I should have taken more cash out in Mumbai. Also, don't panic when the lights go out at the airport and/or hotel – brief power outages seem to be a common thing.

This month you have been mostly...

W Skiing over the border into Italy for a pizza and glass of red wine. Great views of Mont Blanc en route! [Howellsey](#)

T Reading about Lake Constance [March 14, issue 144]. A brilliant article! I hate cycling but I totally want to do this trip! [@CorBlastMe](#)

W Basking in the sun in Park Güell, Barcelona, was nice after two months of solid rain in England! [c84moose](#)

f Loving penguins. Magellanic, gentoo, rockhopper and king on the Falkland Islands, and more gentoo, Adélie, chinstrap and a few elusive emperors in Antarctica.

[Tabitha Green](#)

T Getting nostalgic about Norway. Saw aurora twice

from *MS Midnatsol* amid snowy mountains & silence. [@c_waudby](#)

W Whale-watching in Kaikoura (NZ). We also spotted albatross, dolphin and seal on the same trip! [Karen Warren](#)

T Reading *Wanderlust* kick-started research for my upcoming Burma trip. [@blurryedgez](#)

f Doing something new with old currency. We've collaged them to a canvas and it hangs in our living room. Great conversation starter. *Wanderlust and Sippy Cups*

T Chatting Viking sites. You should definitely add Lindholm Hoje, Denmark, to your list. With its atmospheric stone ship settings it is unmissable. [@PParkerAuthor](#)

PHOTO OF THE MONTH

Breakfast is severed...

[Stuart McKay](#)

On my last early morning game drive on Pom Pom Island in the Okavango Delta, we came across a lioness disappearing into the bushes, attracted by the alarm calls of a herd of impala. Our vehicle followed her direction but we positioned ourselves where we hoped she would reappear. When we stopped to wait, I looked down at the ground and at the side of the vehicle was an African rock python in the process of killing a young impala. After a few minutes the lioness appeared, attacked the snake and walked off with her meal.



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WIN a £7,000+ trip to Las Vegas and Nevada's 'Wild West'

Dreaming of the ultimate summer adventure? Head to Nevada, a place where opulence meets the stunning, unique, rugged wilderness...

Think Nevada and no doubt the bright lights of Las Vegas spring to mind. And while there are plenty of reasons to linger in this larger-than-life metropolis, venture past the city and you'll discover a wealth of sagebrush plains, mammoth mountains and plentiful parks peppered across the state. It's a place where those Western movie dreams are brought to life, where those iconic Wild West images of freedom, cowboys and Indians and wealth-inducing gold mines come true.

With this majestic Silver State celebrating its 150th birthday this year, there's no better time or place to take your luxury summer adventure. To mark the milestone, *Wanderlust*, the Nevada Commission on Tourism and Abercrombie & Kent have joined forces to offer one lucky

reader and their companion a trip to this stunning state. Read on to be in with a chance of winning an exciting, wild and diverse journey...

SHINE A LIGHT ON THE STRIP

Appearing like a neon mirage from the dusty Nevada desert, Las Vegas is the bright, beating heart of the state. But this celebrated city isn't just about gambling and excess – there's culture everywhere, hidden in plain sight. Downtown Las Vegas is drenched in history yet infused with new developments. You can watch a Broadway show, enjoy the ballet or let the soothing sounds of the Las Vegas Philharmonic Orchestra wash over you at the Smith Center for Performing Arts. If the darker side of Vegas catches your attention, you

can chart the rise of US gangsters at the Mob Museum. Or, for maximum excitement, head to the new 160m 'High Roller' – the world's tallest observation wheel – from which you'll have sweeping views of the glittering Strip below.

And after a day of exploring, spend your nights in the non-gaming Mandarin Oriental, one of Vegas' cluster of AAA Five Diamond-winning and Forbes Five-Star hotels. It offers omnipresent extravagance, including spacious suites and panoramic floor-to-ceiling windows.

LEAVING LAS VEGAS

Beyond the opulence of Vegas there's plenty more to discover. 'Cowboy Country', as the north is known, is where luxury meets the Wild West – all guns blazing. The 1,544ft high city of Elko



The wildest adventure (clockwise from above): Mustang Monument's bar; the Bellagio fountains; the Mandarin Oriental tea lounge; Mustang Monument's Madeline Pickens with Paint; the dining teepee at Mustang Monument

though, with its Old West cordiality, is where the real wranglers work and play. From here you can trek up the snow-capped Ruby Mountains, fabled as the 'Alps of Nevada'. A moderate hike will take you past alpine lakes where white powder still carpets the ground in summer. There are also plentiful opportunities to hunt, fish, boat, and camp in and around Elko, as well as the chance to enjoy the area's Basque heritage through its hearty cuisine.

Drive on north and discover Jarbidge, a historic mining town in the depths of a wild canyon. Or head east to West Wendover where culture vultures can touch World War 2 bombers at the Historic Wendover Airfield.

JUMP IN THE SADDLE

For an equine adventure, head to Nevada's Mustang Monument, an eco-resort and wild horse sanctuary. A majestic blend of nature and tranquillity, the reserve supports the 600 wild horses that roam the vast mountain ranges of Wells. You'll ride, observe and learn about these beautiful creatures by day before embarking on an off-road safari, trying your hand at archery

and taking calf-roping lessons.

If you're still feeling active, why not hike through 2,300 sq km of untamed wilderness and discover the Spruce Mountains and Goshute Valley? From here you can explore the region's flowing creeks and scenic vistas led by a knowledgeable guide. Combine that with tales of the Wild West and you're in for the adventure of a lifetime.

In the evenings, relax around a campfire back at Mustang Monument and eat gourmet cuisine while hearing spellbinding stories about the area. When you're ready for bed, your sumptuous five-star tipi awaits. Draped with Native American rugs, this outback-chic retreat is where grandeur meets widescreen Nevada nirvana.

This complete luxury adventure including flights from the UK, three nights in the tranquil opulence of the Mandarin Oriental hotel, car hire and four nights at Mustang Monument, is available from tailormade experts Abercrombie & Kent for just £3,990 per person (based on two adults sharing) or you can enter our amazing competition and see if lady luck is on your side. To book a trip call 0845 485 1132 or visit www.abercrombiekent.co.uk/nevada.

How to enter

Abercrombie & Kent is offering one reader and a friend the chance to win the luxury Nevada experience, including flights to Las Vegas, car rental, three nights at the Mandarin Oriental Las Vegas and three nights at the Mustang Monument. Five runners up will win Páramo jackets (see below). To enter, simply answer the following:

Q: How tall are the Ruby Mountains?

- a) over 9,000ft
- b) over 11,000ft
- c) over 13,000ft

To enter, and for full terms & conditions, visit www.wanderlust.co.uk/competitions or send your answer, name and contact info on a postcard to the Wanderlust office (p2). Closing dates for entries is 21 May 2014. State 'no offers' if you'd rather not be contacted by *Wanderlust* or the sponsors.



Abercrombie & Kent



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With ever-changing temperatures and diverse terrains it can be hard to prepare for a trip to Nevada. But just three kilos of Páramo gear – intelligently designed by experts who love the outdoors – promises to take you everywhere in comfort – even the dusty Wild West! And *Wanderlust* readers can save 15% on special 'Nevada systems' clothing – and be put in the draw to win one of five jackets worth £130 each – when they visit www.paramo.co.uk/nevada



For more information see www.travelnevada.co.uk



A tropical beach at sunset. The sky is a mix of deep blue and warm orange, with soft clouds. A palm tree's fronds are visible on the left side of the frame. In the distance, a small, simple boat floats on the calm water. The foreground is a wide, sandy beach with some footprints.

ISLES OF ADVENTURE

Crowd-free crescents, UNESCO-listed dots, the map's hardest-to-reach corners... we've scoured the globe to the find the most interesting islands you've (probably) never heard of but really should visit, plus a few much-maligned ones that deserve a second chance

DAHLAK ARCHIPELAGO ERITREA

Coordinates: 15°50'N 40°12'E • Area: 643 sq km (main island only) • Population: 2,500

Unsung Red Sea retreat

Why go? If you think Sharm el-Sheikh lacks a certain cachet these days, then the Dahlak Archipelago is the Red Sea spot for you. Comprising more than 200 islands – only four of which are inhabited – the whole area is a national park, where the few locals still herd goats, rear camels and fish in traditional ways, and where the wildlife really rules the roost. The diving is superb; as a consequence of years of war with Ethiopia, large-scale fishing was halted here, and a profusion of sea critters remains. Also, the ships and military hardware sunk in the wake of the conflict – particularly at Nokra, on the main island of Dahlak Kebir – are now rife with marine life, from colourful corals to turtles and rays. As some of the wrecks are only a few metres deep, they're explorable by anyone with a mask and snorkel.

When to go: The best times to visit are April-early June and September-November. The rainy season is December-March; July-August is very hot.

How to go: The nearest mainland port to the archipelago is Massawa, 120km from Eritrea's capital Asmara. Permits are required to visit the Dahlak islands; for tour companies licensed to take travellers there, see www.eritrea.be.



IKARIA GREECE

Coordinates: 37°35'N 26°10'E • Area: 255 sq km • Population: 8,420

Land of legend, longevity – and few tourists

Why go? Named after over-ambitious Icarus, who fell nearby after flying too close to the sun, the island of Ikaria seems a similarly unreachable target. Only 50km off the Turkish coast, it was long ignored by the rest of Greece; even now, few ferries make it here. But it's worth the bother, because isolation has left the island little scarred by the 21st century. The tavernas, traditions, food and feel remain typically Ikarian. The landscape is an undulation of richly forested mountains (peaking at 1,037m) that plunge to a 160km-long coastline, free of large-scale development. There are fishing villages and olive groves, Roman baths and ruined temples. And there are also truly fascinating people: the island is one of the world's few 'blue zones' – places where the residents live astonishingly long lives. On average, Ikarians live ten years longer than people in the rest of Europe. They also have far lower rates of cancer, depression and dementia, and stay physically active into their 90s. Visit for a week, live like a local and hope the longevity rubs off.

When to go: June-September has milder temperatures and fewer tourists. Ikaria celebrates many saints' Feast Days from April to October – see www.island-ikaria.com/nightlife/panagiria.asp.

How to go: Ferries run to Ikaria from Samos (4-5hrs), the maritime hub of the eastern Aegean. Flights link both Ikaria and Samos with Athens (both around 40mins).





RAJA AMPAT INDONESIA

Coordinates: **0°14'S 130°31'E** • Area: **46,000 sq km** • Population: **48,000**

Regal isles in the world's richest waters

Why go? Raja Ampat means Four Kings, which is misleading seeing as more like 1,500 islands make up this remote archipelago off the north-west coast of Papua. It is certainly fit for royalty though, comprising 46,000 sq km of gloriously fashioned landscapes and clear, turquoise seas. The islands themselves vary enormously: some are barely a bump of jungle-cloaked karst; some rise out of the blue like clusters of mushrooms; others – such as Waigeo and Misool – are larger, and ideal for homestays with local Biakese people and hikes to rock art and ancient cliff burial sites. However, it's the region's waters that really draw intrepid travellers. Raja Ampat is at the heart of the Coral Triangle and, according to Conservation International, has the highest marine diversity in the world – 75% of the world's coral species have been recorded here, along with 1,430 species of reef fish and six of the world's seven marine turtle species. Joining a liveaboard dive trip is an excellent and efficient way to navigate. Good dive sites include Sardine and Chicken reefs, where snappers and fusiliers throng, and The Passage, off Waigeo, a fine shallow dive amid mangroves and soft coral.

When to go: October-April is the best time – the weather is drier, the seas calmer and underwater visibility greatest.

How to go: Flights to Sorong (West Papua), the gateway to Raja Ampat, run from Jakarta (4hrs), Makassar (South Sulawesi; 2hrs) and Manado (North Sulawesi; 3hrs). Ferries link Sorong to Waisai (2-3hrs), the capital of the archipelago. See www.indonesia.travel.

MALLORCA SPAIN

Coordinates: **39°37'N 2°59'E** • Area: **3,640 sq km** • Population: **869,067**

Much-maligned Balearic beauty

Why go? It's a case of one naughty schoolboy spoiling things for the whole class. Just because a 30km stretch of Mallorca's coastline has been ruined by package high-rises, the entire island gets written off. And yet, leave the blighted Bay of Palma and you discover an island of monasteries, mountains, historic ports and untouched coves. The Sierra de Tramuntana, looming over the Balearic isle's north-west, is the wildest area. Here you can hike along a network of trails of varying difficulty; maps are available in capital Palma and the pretty town of Sóller, the best base for mountain forays. Also in the north, head to the tiny, tumbling village of Deià, where poet Robert Graves is buried; take your binoculars to the Parc Natural de s'Albufera, a wetland wonderland for birds; and explore the Roman ruins of Pollentia, which date to the first century BC.

When to go: Spring and autumn are best for hiking and quieter beaches. Almond trees bloom late January-early March. Cosmopolitan Palma is open for city breaks year round.

How to go: Many airlines fly from the UK to Palma (from 2.5hrs).







CHRISTMAS ISLAND AUSTRALIA

Coordinates: 10°29'S 105°38'E • Area: 135 sq km • Population: 2,700

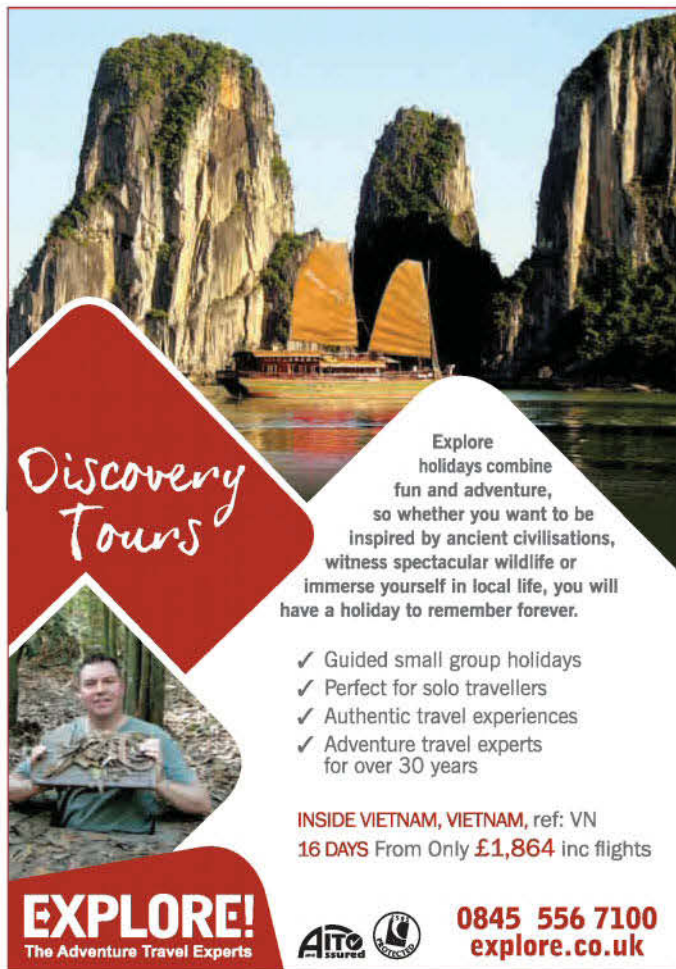
Tropical Oz outpost with copious crabs

Why go? Discovered afloat in the Indian Ocean on Christmas Day 1643, this Australian territory – the summit of a submerged mountain – is closer to Indonesia than its motherland. It's certainly tropical in feel, cloaked in rainforest and rich in endemic species. Foremost of these is the Christmas Island red crab – around 120 million of the crimson crustaceans live here. And once a year they make a mass migration from their forest burrows to the sea to breed. Spurred by the phases of the moon, they sideways-skitter down cliffs, over rocks and across roads to reach the coast. It takes some luck with timing to catch them (though Parks Australia issues predictions), but there's more to this island than its relocating crabs. The diving is superb (come November–April for whale sharks); the birdwatching raucous (80,000 seabirds nest here); and, with 63% of the island designated as a national park, the hiking is varied and pristine.

When to go: Temperatures vary little (22–28°C year-round). Wet season is December–March. The red crab migration usually occurs November–January.

How to go: Flights to Christmas Island leave from Perth (3.5hrs) and Jakarta (1hr). See www.christmas.net.au. ►

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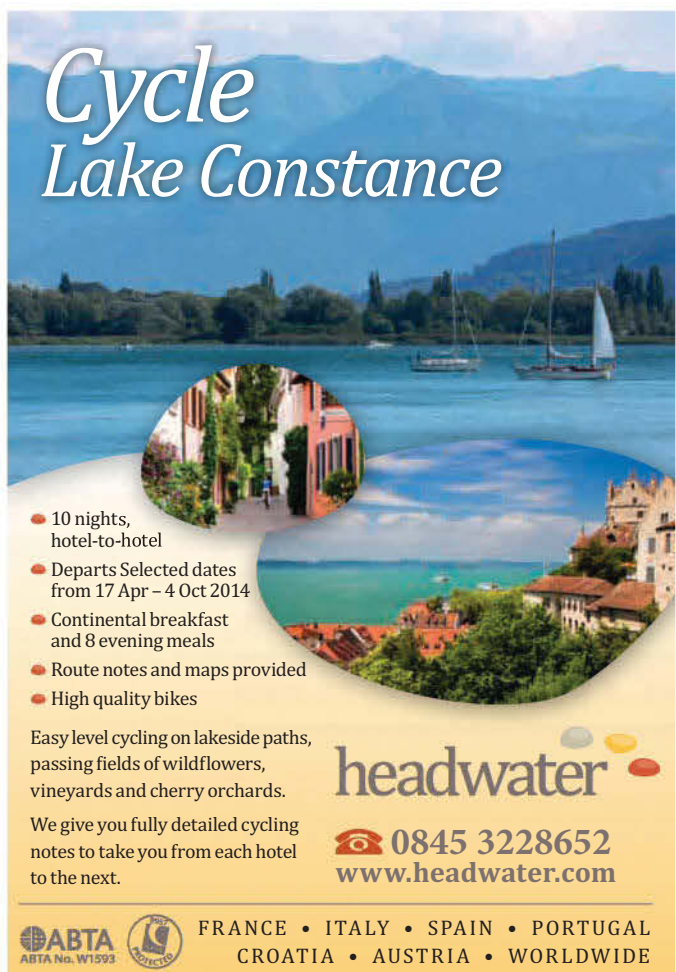
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MACAU

Coordinates: 22°10'N 113°33'E • Area: 29.5 sq km • Population: 591,900

A great deal more than gambling

Why go? This formerly Portuguese enclave of Asia – comprising the Macau Peninsula and the islands of Taipa and Coloane – is best known for its casinos. The gambling dens here make more money than Vegas, and are almost as glitzy. But this Special Administrative Region of China isn't all craps. Though you can daytrip from Hong Kong, it's worth staying several days. The centre of Macau is UNESCO-listed, with baroque churches, wide squares and crumbling mansions that nod to its rich colonial history. There's also a 17th-century fort, Taoist temples, world-class museums and little antique shops. The food's good too – a fusion of Portuguese and Chinese, so you can follow your crispy fried pork with a *pasteis de nata* (egg custard tart). To really get away from all the bling, aim for the nine sq km island of Coloane. In Coloane Village, high-rises are swapped for fishing boats, quiet temples and Catholic chapels, while there's an expanse of green, hilly parkland to roam.

When to go: October-December is the best time – the weather is cool and clear. March-May is also pleasant. July-September is typhoon season.

How to go: There are no direct flights from the UK to Macau International Airport; flights run via hubs such as Hong Kong and Bangkok. Ferries run between Hong Kong and Macau (from 45mins). ►



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AZORES PORTUGAL

Coordinates: **41°44'N 25°40'W** • Area: **2,333 sq km** •
Population: **245,746**

One of the world's best for whales

Why go? Oh the irony. The Azores archipelago – nine islands castaway in the mid-Atlantic, a long, long way from their Portuguese motherland – was once best known as a whaling base. The industry took off from the 19th century, and continued up until 1984, though even then methods were rather old school. Now, many whaling traditions persist – there are still whaleboat regattas, and *vigias* (whalers' lookout towers) have been restored for tourists. However, the focus is now on *watching* – not hunting – the leviathans that pass by in such great numbers. In-season excursions have a 95% success rate; it's not unknown to see six or more species in one outing, ranging from sperm whales to bottlenose dolphins to mighty blues. Most visitors to the Azores stick to São Miguel, but head further afield to Pico and Faial – particular whale hotspots.

When to go: The weather is most settled April-October. Wildflowers bloom April-June. Various species of baleen whales (fin, sei, humpback, blue) migrate past in spring; sperm whales are resident year round.

How to go: From April to October there are direct flights from Gatwick to Ponta Delgada, on São Miguel (4hrs); flights run year-round via Lisbon.



ST LUCIA

Coordinates: **14°1'N 60°59'W** • Area: **617 sq km** •
Population: **173,765**

Caribbean isle with extra kick

Why go? Contrary to brochure belief, you don't have to be a honeymooning couple holding hands on a beach to like St Lucia. This is one of the Caribbean's lushest, hillier islands, peaking at 950m Mt Gimie – though it's the two pointy Pitons that feature in more photos. A hike in the island's rainforested interior will pass waterfalls, giant ferns and wild orchids, plus a bevy of birds. St Lucia also boasts the world's only drive-in volcano (Qualibou), cacao estates (where you can go on tasty tours) and a colourful market (head to capital Castries on a Saturday morning). Don't miss a trip to Pigeon Island, a national park dominated by an 18th-century fort, and a whale-watching trip: sperm whales and various dolphins are common, and humpbacks and orcas swim by from time to time.

When to go: The weather is best mid-December-April; these are also the busiest and priciest months. May-early June will be quieter and cheaper, if muggier. Hurricane season is June-November. The best time for humpbacks is January-April.

How to go: There are non-stop flights from the UK to St Lucia's Hewanorra International Airport (8.5hrs). ►



SNOW HILL ISLAND ANTARCTICA

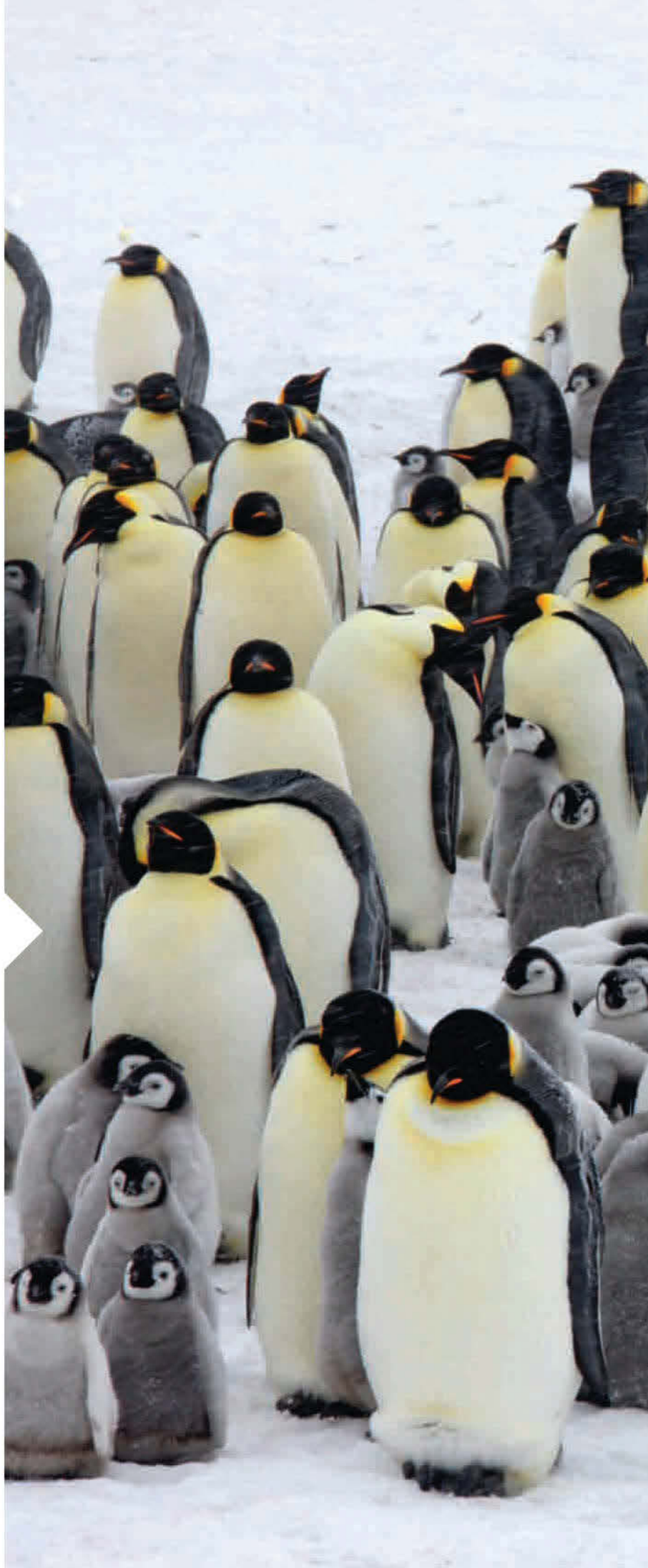
Coordinates: 64°28'S 57°12'W • Area: 371 sq km • Population: 0

Remote rookery of regal birds

Why go? Though Snow Hill Island was discovered in 1843, its 4,000-strong colony of emperor penguins – the biggest penguin species – was only found in 2005. It's unsurprising: this icy outcrop is remote even in Antarctic terms, often hemmed in by the frozen, floe-choked Weddell Sea. Indeed, it often takes an off-ship, weather-dependent helicopter excursion to reach the rookery; choppers land several kilometres away to minimise disturbance. If you do make it to the island's south-west corner, one of the world's greatest wildlife experiences awaits: a noisy gaggle of regal birds, the adults up to 120cm tall, tending their fluffball chicks in the middle of pristine polar nowhere.

When to go: November–December, to see the emperor penguins with their chicks.

How to go: Expedition cruises leave from Ushuaia (Argentina); a few head for the Weddell Sea and attempt to reach Snow Hill Island, using helicopters to get closer to the colony. ►





◀ SAMOSIR INDONESIA

Coordinates: 2°35'N 98°49'E • Area: 630 sq km • Population: 130,568

Intriguing island within an island

Why go? Unlike the other islands here, Samosir is not all at sea. This is the world's largest island within an island, a colossal volcanic lump the size of Singapore stranded in Sumatra's Lake Toba – itself the largest volcanic lake in the world. The highest point of Samosir looms around 800m above lake level (a worthwhile hike for the views). Down at the shore, there's geothermally warmed swimming and boat trips galore. Most interesting, though, is delving into the local culture – Samosir is the heartland of the laidback and welcoming Toba Batak people. Visit Batak villages (Simarmata is one of the best preserved), watch a traditional Batak dance and pay your respects at the tomb of King Sidabutar, the Batak ruler who adopted Christianity in the 19th century.

When to go: May-September is the driest period.

How to go: The closest airport to Parapat, the harbour on the eastern side of Lake Toba, is Medan (4-5hrs by bus). Ferries leave from Parapat for Tuk Tuk (1hr) on Samosir. See www.indonesia.travel.



FERNANDO DE NORONHA BRAZIL

Coordinates: 3°51'S 32°25'W • Area: 26 sq km • Population: 2,720

Latin stunner, with an eco feel

Why go? Some 350km adrift from the Brazilian mainland, and a smidgen south of the equator, the Fernando de Noronha archipelago is a 21-island eco-paradise. The waters are impossibly emerald, the ethos equally green – 70% of Noronha is protected in a national park, and visitors must pay a mandatory Environment Protection Tax on arrival. UNESCO also approves, having inscribed the archipelago on its list for its rich waters (which are 'extremely important for the breeding and feeding of tuna, shark and turtle') and its avifauna – Noronha is home to the largest concentration of tropical seabirds in the Western Atlantic. It's also just a beautiful place to be. The beaches, even by high Brazilian standards, are spectacular, with Praia do Sancho generally considered pick of the bunch. The water is full of frolicking spinner dolphins and (allegedly) friendly lemon and nurse sharks. There are also abundant reef fish; some are nice to swim with, others turn up at delicious beach barbecues. The hiking is good too: hit the Esmeralda Coast Trail to spot diving pelican or trek to Pedra Alta Little Point, site of Brazil's first shipwreck.

When to go: The dry and high season is September-March. Maximum temperatures average in the high 20°Cs year round. Turtle nesting and hatching season is December-July.

How to go: Flights to Noronha leave from Natal (1hr) and Recife (1hr) on the mainland. See www.visitbrasil.com.

TENERIFE SPAIN

Coordinates: 28°16'N 16°36'W • Area: 2,034 sq km • Population: 908,555

Holiday hell, explorer's heaven

Why go? Yes, Playa de las Américas is your common or garden holiday nightmare, and hunks of the largest Canary Island have been butchered by package resorts. But don't dismiss all of Tenerife. Get away from the south coast and you'll discover a surprisingly varied and traditional island, where fiestas are preferred to discotheques and the land has been left to go wild. Perhaps wildest of the lot is 3,718m Mount Teide, Spain's highest peak and the pinnacle of a weird, lunar-ish, lava-ed landscape that might see snow, even while 'lobsters' are basting on the beaches below. Tenerife has myriad microclimates, best experienced via footpaths hacked by the Guanche (the original islanders); head to the northern valleys of Masca and Güímar for the most splendid isolation.

When to go: Year-round. Best are spring and autumn – balmy, but without the summer crowds. November can be rainy. It's still shorts-weather in December-January.

How to go: Many airlines fly from the UK to Tenerife Sur airport (from 4.5hrs), which is 20km east of touristy Playa de las Américas.



WRANGEL ISLAND RUSSIA

Coordinates: 71°14'N 179°25'W • Area: 7,600 sq km • Population: 0

Desolate Arctic wilderness with abundant wildlife

Why go? Why indeed – you'd think you'd want to avoid this hostile, hard-to-reach Russian *zapovednik* (strict nature reserve), which remains littered with the detritus of would-be settlers past. But in the summer months, when the daylight is continuous and the melted sea ice permits ships to come close, Wrangel is one of the hottest wildlife tickets in town. Thought to be the last redoubt of the woolly mammoth (which survived here until around 2000 BC), the island is now home to a high density of polar bears (around 350-500) plus reindeer, musk ox and Arctic fox. It's also beloved of 80,000 Pacific walruses, which gather on the rocks and floes here to breed. And birdlife is abundant: snowy owls nest on the tundra, snow geese flock on the 900-odd lakes and colonies of kittiwakes clamour on the cliffs.


When to go: July-August, when temperatures peak at around 15°C. This is when walruses gather, the island's 400 plant species burst into life and cruises run.

How to go: Only accessible by very few specialist expedition cruises a year. Voyages leaving Nome (Alaska) may also include the Russian Kamchatka and Chukchi peninsulas. ►

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LAMU KENYA

Coordinates: **2°16'S 40°54'E** • Area: **approx 80 sq km** •
Population: **approx 20,000**

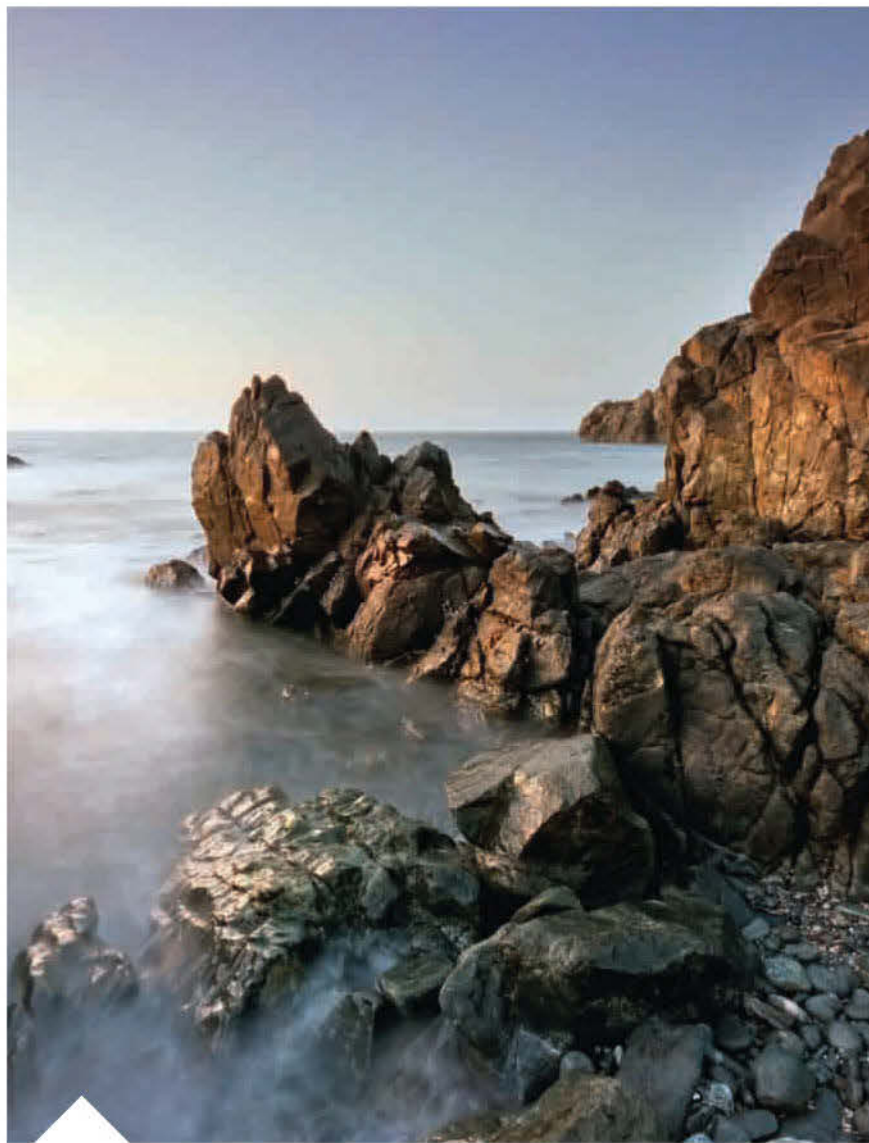
Resurgent Swahili isle

Why go? Recent times have been tough for Lamu.

A couple of kidnappings in the region in 2011 provoked governments to issue 'don't go' travel warnings, and travellers dutifully stayed away. But heightened marine security has seen advisories lifted and has put this laidback hangout back on the map. Thank goodness, because Islamic, welcoming, car-free Lamu is really quite unique. It's home to the last and best-preserved Swahili settlement in East Africa: UNESCO-listed Lamu Old Town, built from coral and mangrove wood, is an atmospheric warren of alleys, verandas and secretive doors dating from the 14th century. The beach-life is fine too, whether you want to laze in the fishing village of Shela, watch the dhow-builders at work in Matondoni or swim with the dolphins offshore.

When to go: July-October, when it's warm and dry, are the best months, followed by hotter January-March. The rainy seasons are April-June and November-December. Lamu Cultural Festival is held in November.

How to go: The nearest airstrip is on neighbouring Manda Island, served by flights from Nairobi (2hrs) and Mombasa (75mins). Ferries connect Manda and Lamu.



MASIRAH OMAN

Coordinates: **20°28'N 58°48'E** • Area: **649 sq km** • Population: **12,000**

Turtle heaven in the Arabian Sea

Why go? Members of the RAF once based on Masirah dubbed it Fantasy Island – though not because of its wonders, but because getting anything you wanted while stationed here was pure fantasy. Still, the lack of development that frustrated expats will excite travellers: this hilly outcrop of sand and palm trees is one big natural oasis. Birds, including flamingos and oystercatchers, flock beaches strewn with rare shells and the wrecks of salt-encrusted dhows. However, turtles are the main draw – four species come here to nest throughout the year, including one of the world's largest populations of loggerheads, numbering around 30,000. A hike up Jebel Humr (274m), Masirah's high-point, provides a good island overview.

When to go: The weather is cooler and less humid November-April. Green turtles nest July-October and hatch September-December. Loggerheads nest May-September and hatch July-November. Olive ridleys and hawksbills nest February-May and hatch April-August.

How to go: Ferries leave from Shana'a (5-6hr drive south of Muscat); the crossing to Hilf, Masirah's main town, takes from 1.5hrs. See www.omantourism.gov.om. ►



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ÅLAND ISLANDS

SWEDEN/ FINLAND

Coordinates: **60°07'N 19°54'E** •

Area: **6,787 sq km** • Population: **27,500**

**Independent-minded
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Scandi style**

Why go? The Åland Islands do it their own way. Adrift in the north Baltic Sea, this cluster of 6,500 outcrops is 'an autonomous and monolingual Swedish region of Finland'. It even has its own stamps and its own flag. It's also the place to have a proper Scandinavian summer stay. Rent a cottage by the coast on the main island, Fasta Åland – itself, only 50km north to south – and make the most of the long days. Cycle to 14th-century Kastelholm Castle; hike the three-day 63km Sadelin trail, which wends via primeval forests and ancient burial grounds; and explore capital Mariehamn's maritime heritage. Then catch a ferry to one of the tiny villages on the outlying islands. Or kayak with sea eagles around the uninhabited atolls – the safe, isle-scattered Föglö area is ideal for beginners.

When to go: June-August is high season, when temperatures can reach the mid-20°Cs and most Finns/Swedes visit; around this time it's light from 3am to 10pm. May and September are quieter options. Winters can be cold (-10°C).

How to go: The fastest ferries leave from Grisslehamn or Kapellskär (both Greater Stockholm; 2hrs) and Turku (Finland; 5hrs). Flights to Mariehamn airport leave from Stockholm (30mins), Turku (30mins) and Helsinki (1hr). See www.visitaland.com. ►





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CAPE VERDE

Coordinates: **15°06'N 23°37'W** • Area: **4,033 sq km** • Population: **531,046**

Atlantic archipelago with a Portuguese twist

Why go? Ten volcanic islands make up Cape Verde – but most tourists see only one of them. Sal has an international airport and an awful lot of sand; the windsurfing's good too. But there's more to this Atlantic archipelago, lurking 570km west of Senegal. Santiago, the biggest island, has lush and craggy mountains, good for walking. Its UNESCO-listed Cidade Velha was the first city built by Europeans in the tropics and has impressive remains including a royal fortress and Pillory Square. São Vicente is the place to dip into Cape Verde's musical heritage; hit the bars of its main town, Mindelo, to hear live *morna* and *coladeira* – the area's creole-inflected music. Perhaps most worth a ferry ride is Santo Antão, a geological wonder of high peaks, where villages teeter on verdant valleysides and seemingly everything grows – from banana palms and pineapples to pines, carobs, eucalypts, dates and almonds. Driving the old road from Porto Novo to Ribeira Grande will showcase the island's rugged richness. Also seek out Vila das Pombas, where tiny pastel-painted houses line the promenade against a backdrop of coconut palms.

When to go: Cape Verde is sunny and warm year round. Rainy season is July-October.

How to go: Charter flights fly direct from UK airports to Sal and Boa Vista (6hrs); scheduled flights require a change in Lisbon. Domestic flights hop between islands (except Santo Antão and Brava, which don't have airports). Ferry services operate but can be irregular; there is a daily ferry between São Vicente and Santo Antão (55mins).



BUCCANEER ARCHIPELAGO AUSTRALIA

Coordinates: **16°07'S 123°20'E** • Area: **50 sq km** • Population: **0**

Wild West Coast alternative to Queensland's Whitsundays

Why go? It's not easy to reach the Buccaneer Archipelago. This uninhabited scatter of around 1,000 islands is strewn off Western Australia's Kimberley Coast – which itself is fairly inaccessible. You don't accidentally pass through the Kimberley: this is the end of the road. And the Buccaneers are beyond it. Subsequently, they are almost flawless, fringed by white sands and mangroves, fuzzed by rainforest and teeming with critters – from crocodiles to fish, bats and birds. There has been some human interference, however: hikes onto the islands will reveal Aboriginal rock art daubed on cave walls and the burial sites of the pearlers who used to work these waters. Don't leave without taking a dip at Silica Beach, shooting the horizontal waterfall in Talbot Bay (the result of some of the biggest tides in the world), collecting and shucking oysters fresh from the rocks and keeping a lookout for dolphins and whales.

When to go: The dry season is May to October. Waterfalls are fullest April-May, just after the wet season. July-September is the best time for spotting humpbacks.

How to go: Cruises and sea safaris operate from Broome and Derby in Western Australia. Scenic flights also run from Derby. Helicopter and float-plane charters are possible. See www.westernaustralia.com. ►






CHANNEL ISLANDS USA

Coordinates: 34°00'N 119°48'W • Area: 909 sq km • Population: 3,700

California's answer to the Galápagos

Why go? Dive with sea lions, watch humpbacks breach, snorkel through kelp forests and train your binoculars on the birds (including ten endemic species) – the Channel Islands, eight low-lying isles stretched along California's Pacific coast, are the natural world's Hollywood. This largely uninhabited and largely protected haven is a place where wildlife can flourish – their relative isolation has allowed a rare coastal Mediterranean-type habitat to develop, encompassing 790 types of plants. However, it's in the water that things get most exciting, with a diversity of dolphins, seals, whales and more drawn here to feed and breed. Cetacean-spotting boat trips could yield humpbacks, orca, fin, grey and blue whales. Better, stay longer: each of the five islands within the national park has a campsite, from where you can make forays by foot, kayak or boat.

When to go: The islands are visitable year-round. Summer and autumn are best for snorkelling, diving, kayaking and swimming. Grey whales are present December-April; blues and humpbacks April-September.

How to go: Flights in small twin-engine planes run to Santa Rosa Island from Camarillo (25mins; flightstothechannelislands.com), 100km north-west of LA. Boats leave from Ventura, 140km north-west of LA; Island Packers (islandpackers.com) runs a range of trips. See www.nps.gov/chis. 





Valamar Dubrovnik President



Valamar Dubrovnik President



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Promotional feature

Beauty abounds on a trip to Dubrovnik with **Valamar Hotels**

Discover the heart of Croatia when you stay in one of Valamar's revitalised retreats

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A day of Dubrovnik

Reopening in June, the five-star Valamar Dubrovnik President Hotel sits at the very tip of the Babin Kuk peninsula, looking across to the picturesque Elaphiti Islands. Take in the views from the terrace of your sun-drenched luxury room, then explore the islands's gentle bays, beautiful beaches and dense forests that await you via a boat trip across the water.

If you just fancy some pampering, the Valamar Dubrovnik President's renovations include an indulgent wellness area, high-end restaurants, indoor and outdoor pools and a first-class level of personalised service.

Meanwhile, the relaunched Valamar Argosy Hotel has plenty of pleasures of its own: the landscaped meditation gardens, its own wellbeing area and the pebble Copacabana Beach is just a stone's throw away. And at dinner, you can enjoy views of Daksia Island from your table.

Of course, the headline attraction is that Dubrovnik's city walls and UNESCO-listed Old Town are just 6km away. We'd suggest getting to the walls early, meaning the 2km promenade of preserved stonework will be all yours. And at the end of the day exploring the Old Town and surrounding Mount Srd, return to the verdant oasis of your Valamar hotel – your exclusive seafront retreat.

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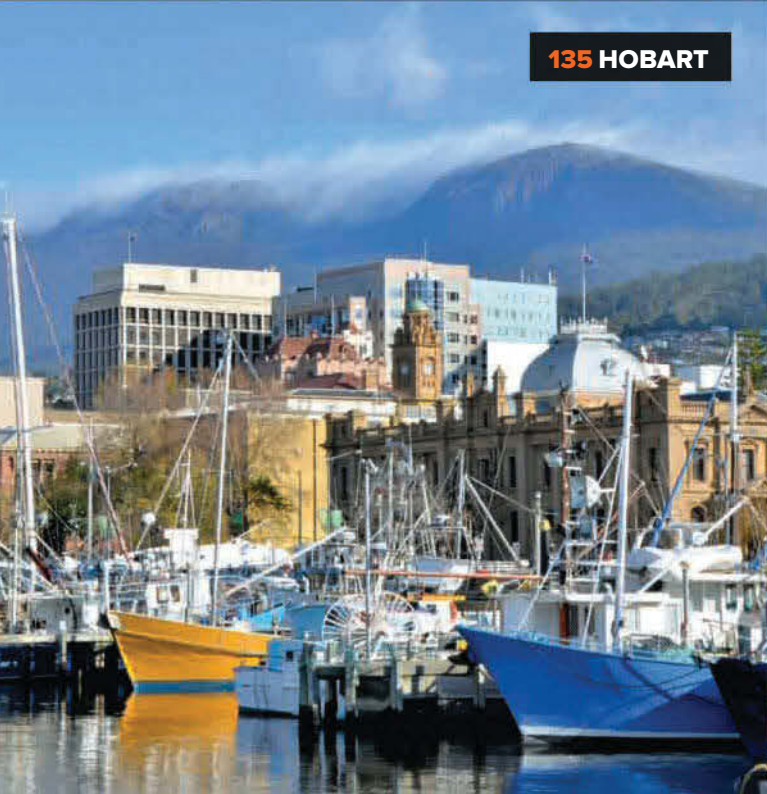
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Midsummer sun
Svalbard's typically icy peaks loom over Longyearbyen's colourful huts



Svalbard, Norway

This northern Norwegian outpost is a realm of ragged peaks, polar bears and untouched Arctic splendour – and summer sees it at its most accessible

i Get orientated

Svalbard is the icy desert at the top of the world. Nestled midway between Norway and the North Pole, this remote 'Land of Cold Coasts' comprises three main islands and many smaller ones, flung out into the Arctic Ocean 640km from its European motherland.

The largest isle is Spitsbergen, followed by Nordaustlandet and Edgeøya; other islands include Barentsøya, Prins Karls Forland and numerous islets and skerries. Spitsbergen is the only permanently inhabited isle.

If it weren't for the Gulf Stream, thick sea ice would entrap the archipelago. In fact, this warming current keeps Svalbard much milder than its latitude would suggest, and means that – in summer – seas are navigable by cruise vessels.

A voyage here might yield sightings of the archipelago's 19 species of marine mammals, while on land you may spot Arctic foxes, reindeer

and snow bunting. The biggest draws, though, are the islands' 3,000 polar bears, the world's largest land carnivore.

✈ Getting there

Norwegian (0843 3780 888, norwegian.com) flies Gatwick-Longyearbyen (on Spitsbergen), via Oslo, from £198 return. Total flight time is about five hours. There is no regular ferry service between Svalbard and Norway.

On Spitsbergen there are no roads between settlements and internal transport is either by snowmobile (winter) or boat (summer). Strict rules apply to the movements of visitors – see www.visitnorway.com for full guidelines.

🚶 The visit

Svalbard is ideal for a summer high-seas adventure. From mid-April the skies shine bright all day (in Longyearbyen, the midnight sun lasts from

15 April to 26 August), providing lots of light for outdoor activities. By June the sea ice has melted sufficiently to allow boats to cruise the floe-dotted seas. This makes June to early September the best time to embark on expeditions to glimpse walrus and polar bears on the pack ice and whales in the water. Note, eastern Svalbard tends to experience heavier ice conditions; most ships concentrate on the archipelago's west side.

Summer also sees wildflowers bloom and a flurry of bird activity. Kayaking, hiking and climbing are best from July, when most snow has melted.

You can still visit in winter (November-March). The polar night means 24-hour darkness from 14 November to 29 January, but dog-sledding, snowmobile safaris, glacier walking and skiing are all available. You might even see the northern lights. Don't miss a visit to the Svalbard Museum (75NOK [£7.50pp]; svalbardmuseum.no). For more info, see www.svalbard.net. ▶



◀ Svalbard history

It's thought that Vikings first spotted Svalbard – it was mentioned in an Icelandic document in 1194. However, it was officially discovered by Dutch explorer Willem Barents in 1596, who named it Spitsbergen after its spiky peaks. It became a whaling base from the 17th century, and was used for hunting by the Russians and Norwegians. The archipelago was placed under Norwegian sovereignty in 1925.



◆ Walrus

Since the 1950s the walrus has been a protected species and stocks have increased. It is particularly prevalent on the island of Moffen.



◆ Pack ice

The seas around Svalbard can be covered by pack ice, its extent depending on the season and conditions. The fjords of the islands' western coasts can generally be reached by boat from late May to late autumn. The waters north and east are rarely accessible.



◆ Magdalenefjorden

The scenery around the popular little fjord of Magdalene on the north-west coast of Spitsbergen is spectacular. Most ships visit around here. About 60% of Svalbard is covered by glaciers.

◆ Ny Ålesund

No visit is complete without a stop at this, the most northerly permanent settlement in the world and a hub for scientific research. Be sure to send a postcard from the post office and watch out for the terns who have a tendency to dive-bomb visitors!



◆ Longyearbyen

The capital of Svalbard is named after the American JM Longyear, who opened the first mine on Svalbard in 1906. Longyearbyen has a population of 2,000.



■ Essentials

Language: Norwegian

Time: GMT+1 (Mar-Oct GMT+2)

Visas: Not required by UK nationals

Money: Norwegian krone (NOK), currently 10NOK to the UK£

Health: EHIC cards are not valid on Svalbard. At Longyearbyen's hospital, you must pay for treatment upfront and apply for a reimbursement through your travel insurer.

This feature is adapted from the *DK Eyewitness Norway* guide (£14.99), the best visual guide to the country. www.traveldk.com



◆ Kvitøya

The last campsite used by the ill-fated Andrée expedition was found on Kvitøya in 1930 – 33 years after Salomon Andrée attempted to fly from Danskøya island to the North Pole by hot-air balloon.

◆ High points

Newtontoppen (1,713m) and Perriertoppen (1,712m) are Svalbard's highest mountains.



◆ Polar seagull

The polar seagull is one of 15 species of birds nesting on Svalbard, including guillemot, kittiwake, fulmar and little auk.



◆ Svalbard poppy

There are two types of long-stemmed Svalbard poppy: yellow and white.

◆ Polar bear

The polar bear is the largest of the bear species. It can reach 2.8m in length. In winter its fur is snow-white, in summer it's creamier in colour.

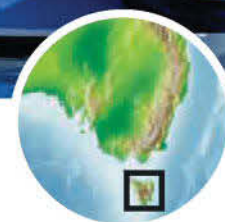


Glacier walking on Austfonna

Walking on the ever-changing glaciers of Svalbard is like being transported back to the Ice Age. Nordaustlandet's Austfonna is the world's third-largest icecap after the Antarctic and Greenland, and has a glacier front of 200km. Walking on Austfonna – or any glacier for that matter – must not be tackled alone; the activity demands alertness, knowledge and the right equipment. Although bottomless crevasses may seem to reveal ancient and tempting secrets, they are very dangerous. Arrange a trip with an authorised local guide.

Harbour highlights

Hobart's wharf is the spot to try the locally sourced fish 'n' chips



Hobart, Tasmania

Dismissed as a backwater, the Tassie capital – with its super setting, rich history, fabulous food and thriving culture – is coming of age, reckons **James Stewart**

i Before you arrive

It used to be an Aussie joke that Hobart was 30 years behind the country's other state capitals. In many ways it still is. The nation's second-oldest city remains small in scale and relaxed in atmosphere; its focus is still the broad Derwent estuary that appealed to the British in 1803; its architecture is still Georgian and Federation, from days as a busy whaling and agricultural port, rather than glass high-rises.

It's only in the past five years or so that 'mainlanders' (as Tasmanians call all other Australians) have started to wonder if these weren't positives all along. Boosted by the cachet of having Australia's Best Cultural Attraction – iconoclastic gallery MONA trumped some old opera house in Sydney in 2013's Gourmet Traveller Awards – Hobart has quietly matured into a self-assured, arty little city. Weekenders from Melbourne and Sydney now arrive in droves, helping to prop up a restaurant and café scene that grows more sophisticated by the year.

Sure, it's gentrification, yet locals pride themselves on the fact that Hobart remains a straight-talking, pretension-free place. Just as a fishing fleet docks opposite one of Hobart's best hotels, scallop pies are as popular as sourdough for lunch, and weekends still officially start in the pub not the wine bar. Come for fine dining, of course, but don't dress up – the locals won't.

All flights arrive over the rural heart of Tasmania. You'll see eucalypt forest and rolling sheep pasture, perhaps a distant mountain and empty surf beaches – Tassie in a nutshell.

✈ At the airport

Located 17km east of the city, near Cambridge, Hobart Airport is as good an introduction to Tasmania as any, with nothing flash but everything you need: a small Arrivals hall with a single luggage carousel, a tourist information desk and two ATMs that accept UK debit/credit cards.

Air connections are domestic only (1hr from Melbourne, 1hr 45mins from Sydney), so you will have already passed through immigration on the mainland. Security with sniffer dogs enforces strict quarantine regulations – no fresh foods or animal products can be brought in; there are bins to dispose of offending items. Taxis and shuttlebuses wait outside.

🚌 Getting into town

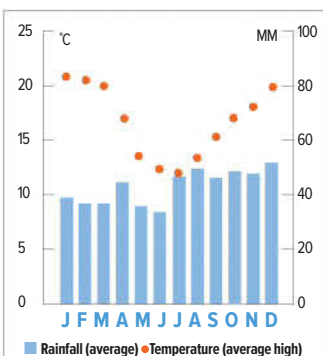
Redline's Airporter shuttlebus (A\$17 [£9] one-way, A\$30 [£16] return; tasredline.com.au) meets all flights – you'll see it parked outside the terminal. It drops off passengers at accommodation in the city centre and inner-city suburbs.

There's little need to take one of the metred taxis that wait outside, but if you want to you'll pay around A\$35 (£19) into the city, A\$5 (£2.75) extra between 8pm-6am and at weekends. To pre-book call City Cabs (+61 131008). ►

◀ HERE'S THE PLAN...

■ Essential Info

Population: 215,000 (Hobart)
Language: English
Timezone: GMT+10 (Oct-Mar GMT+11)
International dialling code: +61
Visas: Required by UK nationals. Free e-Visitor visas are available online at www.immi.gov.au.
Money: Australian dollar (A\$), currently A\$1.85 to the UK£
Best viewpoint: The summit of Mount Wellington (1,270m) is



accessible on a shuttlebus from the tourist office (A\$25 [£14]; hobartshuttlebus.com) or via a five-hour-return hike from south Hobart.
Health issues: None. Bring a good coat in winter (snow is not unknown) and high-factor sun cream in summer.
Recommended guidebooks: *Tasmania* (Lonely Planet, 2011), *Australia* (Rough Guides, 2014)
Web resources: www.discovertasmania.com.au
Climate: Think Britain in reverse: summer temperatures peak at around 24°C from late December to early March. Winters (May–September) average 5–10°C. Spring and autumn are milder. Although Hobart is Australia's second-driest state capital, rain is possible year-round. Accommodation is in short supply during festival season in January.

■ First Day's Tour

Hobart's greatest asset is its waterfront. If you're jetlagged, set aside day one to stroll, café-hop and window-shop. Start at **Salamanca Place**, a parade of galleries, crafts outlets and cafés in Georgian warehouses built for a then-flourishing port – nowhere better captures modern Hobart's marriage of creativity and heritage. If it's a Saturday, you'll coincide with the celebrated crafts and produce market too.

Grab a flat white in the **Tricycle Café**, a lovely nook in the Salamanca Arts Centre (salarts.org.au), then head up to Battery Point. Once the district of dockers and sea captains, this is now the village des-res of well-heeled urbanites. **Jackman & McRoss** (57 Hampden Rd), all bentwood chairs and slow-roast gourmet pies is the patisserie-café for lunch.

Back at Salamanca Place, walk past the Georgian state parliament building to the waterfront; here you'll find Elizabeth Street Pier's restaurants and acclaimed whisky producer, **The Lark Distillery** (larkdistillery.com.au). You'll also find the

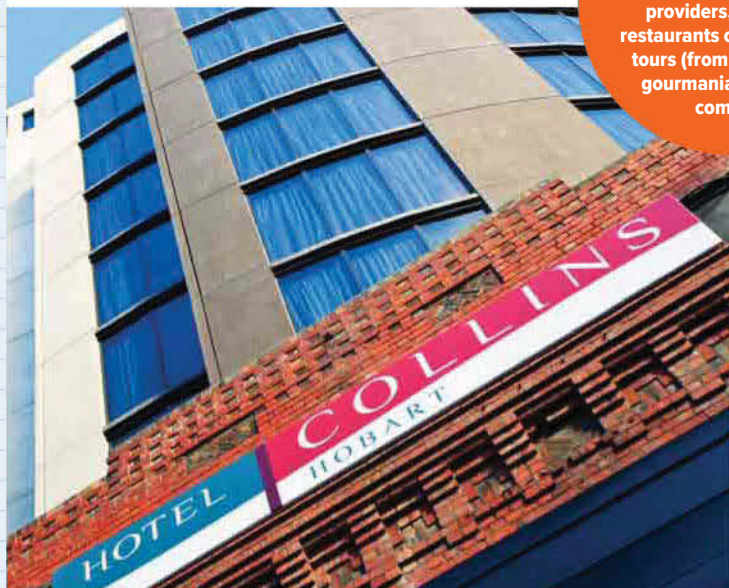


Tasmanian Museum & Art Gallery (free; www.tmag.tas.gov.au), where artfully displayed exhibits narrate everything from aboriginal history to current exploration in Antarctica. **The Maritime Museum of Tasmania** (A\$9 [£5]; maritimetas.org) opposite, covers port history.

Nearby is Hunter Street, where Hobart was first settled. Raise a glass to the city at the harbourside IXL Lounge Bar bar of the **Henry Jones Art Hotel** (thehenryjones.com).

TOP TIP

Ex-chef Mary McNeill winks out Hobart's finest producers, providers, cafés and restaurants on **Gourmania** tours (from A\$95 [£52]; gourmaniafoodtours.com.au).



■ Where to Stay

Top end: There's no better cure for jetlag than The Islington (321 Davey St; islingtonhotel.com). Australia's Best City Boutique Hotel 2013 is pure class; a small Georgian manor with art and oddities, faultless staff, a superb restaurant and mountain views. The only caveat: it's 2km from the centre. Doubles from A\$395 (£215).
Mid-range: Hotel Collins (58 Collins St; www.hotelcollins.com.au) has a central location and metro style. Décor in the

renovated towerblock may lack character, but you'll be too busy gawping at the mountain and harbour views to care. Doubles from A\$275 (£149); half-price standbys often available online.
Budget: Bygone charm and an effusive welcome await at the Astor Private Hotel (157 Macquarie St; astorprivatehotel.com.au), a rambling well-maintained B&B that's superb value for the central location. Doubles from A\$110 (£60); the cheapest rooms share bathrooms.

■ Stay or Go

Stay, no question. The **Museum of Old and New Art** (A\$20 [£11]; mona.net.au) has rebranded Hobart; its subterranean building is as wild as its installations. Arrive by catamaran (A\$20 return) and dine at MONA's gourmet restaurant. Other essentials include scaling **Mt Wellington**, up by half-day hike, down by bike (A\$75 [£41]; mtwellingtondescent.com.au); and trying local produce, from dockside fish 'n' chips to zeitgeist-busting dineries such as **Garagistes** (garagistes.com.au).

Then embark on the Aussie road-trip everyone overlooks. The classic **week-long Tassie circuit** spins clockwise via Port Arthur Penitentiary, the high seacliffs on the Tasman Peninsula, wildlife wonderland Maria Island NP, Freycinet NP, the Bay of Fires and Cradle Mountain. Or go south for hauntingly beautiful **Bruny Island** and **Cockle Creek**, literally the end of the road in Australia, but a gateway to one of the purest patches of wilderness on earth. 📍

Tresco express
Mediterranean
coastline, British
lawns, ideal relaxation



Tresco, Isles of Scilly

A little slice of Britain with a splash of the Med – **Sarah Baxter** heads off the Cornish coast to enjoy a relaxing ramble around the UK's most idyllic getaway

Tresco offers a very literal mini break: although it's the second-biggest of the Isles of Scilly, it measures just 3.5km long by up to 1.75km wide.

However, the tiny numbers are deceptive. Somehow, like a TARDIS fashioned from Cornish granite, Tresco expands once you step ashore. Long walks are possible; there are activities aplenty; castles, coves, real ales, weird plants, seals and sunshine are abundant. The island's lush undulations seem to hide its diminutive size.

That said, Tresco's teensy-ness is one of its biggest draws. Privately owned by the Dorrien-Smith family, the island is home to around 150 permanent residents and no cars; hired bicycles come without locks – there's no need for them. This is a place out of time, basically free of crime and traffic accidents (unless you have a run-in with a golf buggy). And with the Scillies being

officially the warmest place in the British Isles, visiting Tresco is like reliving one of those idyllic childhood summers we all misremember – only here it's made real.

Neolithic field systems suggest people visited this rock, 45km west of Land's End, up to 10,000 years ago, though permanent settlement came much later. Christianity arrived around the tenth century; the Benedictine priory was built in 1120. Subsequently, the Scillies were beset by smugglers and shipwrecks and Civil War battles – King Charles' Castle and Cromwell's Castle, constructed in the 16th and 17th centuries, can still be explored.

In 1834, the Duchy of Cornwall leased the Scillies to wealthy Hertfordshire squire Augustus Smith – known as The Emperor – who became Lord Proprietor of the islands. He moved to Tresco, built schools, completely restructured the farming industry and brought prosperity to the archipelago. While the rest of

the islands have returned to the Duchy, Smith's descendants still own Tresco.

They still live in his house, Tresco Abbey, too, rendering it offlimits. But Smith's glorious garden is open to all; this is where – thanks to the Scillies' clement climate – The Emperor was able to grow eye-catching species from around the globe. Amid the ruins of the 12th-century priory there are now South African king proteas and spiky Caribbean furcraea among the 20,000 other plants surviving the Atlantic gusts – many of which can't be grown anywhere else in the UK.

So Tresco is dash of exotic mixed with the oh-so English. Its waves are the colour of the Mediterranean – that beautiful segue from duck-egg to turquoise to Prussian blue (though the water's a bit chillier). It feels like a little utopia, yet still has a wild, end-of-England edge. A tiddly British island? You fear you might get bored. But you'll end up wanting to stay. ►

◀ HERE'S THE PLAN...

■ Essential Info

When to go: Year-round. Spring (which comes early) and autumn are mild and less crowded. Birdwatchers flock here in mid-October. Summers are sunny but busy.

Getting there: The *Scillonian III* ferry sails Penzance-St Mary's March-November, six times weekly (daily July-early September). Journey time from 2hrs 40mins; singles from £42. Skybus flies from Land's End (20mins) and Newquay (30mins) to St Mary's year-round, and from Exeter (1hr) March-September; singles from £70. Contact Isles of Scilly Travel (01736 334220, islesofscilly-travel.co.uk).

Getting around: St Mary's-Tresco takes 10-20mins by boat. Book via Tresco's Island Office (01720 422849, tresco.co.uk) and transfers are included. Tresco is car-free; bike hire is available (£10/day).

Where to stay: Sea Garden Cottages (from £160pppn B&B) is a classy beachside option; four-night breaks, including flights, transfers, spa access and Abbey Garden tickets, cost from £495pp (www.tresco.co.uk).

The New Inn (from £55pppn B&B) has 16 fresh, bright rooms; four-night packages, including flights and transfers, cost from £450pp (available April-November; www.tresco.co.uk).

Where to eat: The laidback Ruin Beach Café serves good coffee, great breakfasts, wood-fired pizzas, seafood and more.

The New Inn does a fine surf 'n' turf, using Bryher lobster and Tresco steak.

Tresco Stores & Deli sells a range of fresh produce, including veg from Abbey Garden.

Further info: www.tresco.co.uk

Day 1: CYCLE THE SITES

Catch an early flight and you can be through the airport (on main island St Mary's), driven to the quay and jetboated over to Tresco in time for breakfast. Tractor-trailer transfers meet new arrivees at Tresco's jetty – or you can walk.

Not far from Carn Near Quay, at the island's south, is **Abbey Garden** (£12, under-16s free). Roam avenues of exotica – even in mid-winter, more than 300 plants will be in flower. While you're here, walk though Abbey Wood to the **Smith family monument**, for views across to the islands of Bryher and Samson.

Next, **get some wheels** from the Bike Shed, next door to Tresco Stores & Deli. You can cycle alongside soft sandy beaches, ride to The Old Blockhouse (a ruined 16th-century gun tower) or stop for a drink at the lively New Inn. You can also cycle to footpaths that lead into the island's



wilder reaches, particularly the far north-west. Here, two ruined castles sit amid heather and wildflowers.

For more informed strolling and wildlife spotting, join a **guided walk with a Wildlife Trust ranger** (free; weekly in high season; 01720 422153, ios-wildlifetrust.org.uk). The birdwatching is good too, with many migrants using the archipelago as a last stop before heading across the Atlantic. Spring and autumn see the greatest avian diversity. For puffins, sail to Annet (the birds nest April-July).

TOP TIP

Know the lingo: the term 'off-islands' is used to refer to St Agnes, Bryher, Tresco, St Martin's and the uninhabited islands.



Day 2: TAKE TO THE WATER

Thirty sq km of inshore Scillonian waters have been designated a Marine Conservation Zone in order to protect the area's exceptionally high diversity of species and habitats. One of the best ways to take in these special waters is to **hire a kayak** from the Scilly Sailing Centre (Ravensporth, Old Grimsby; sailingscilly.com), which rents out easy to use sit-atop kayaks – some with 'peekaboo' glass panels in the hull (from £28/half-day). The sheltered bay provides possible grey seal sightings.

If the sea further out isn't too choppy, paddle over to uninhabited **St Helen's**. The island's only 0.2 sq km

but is a Site of Special Scientific Interest due to historical finds dating back to the Bronze Age. An easy climb to St Helen's summit provides sweeping views back to Tresco, while the beach is a good picnicking spot. The Centre also offers sailing instruction, from one-hour tasters to multi-day courses, as well as windsurf and stand-up paddleboard hire.

Afterwards, retreat to the **Ruin Beach Café** (above); a veranda and big windows make the most of the views. The food is high quality: top picks include afternoon teas, pizzas from the wood-fired oven (from £10) and the locally sourced seafood.

Day 3: GO ISLAND-HOPPING

Dial down to local pace and you could lose weeks on Tresco, especially if you time your trip to coincide with a local event: Beer Festival (16-20 May), Tresco Fête (17 Aug) and the Tresco & Bryher Food Festival (13-14 Sept). But it would be a shame not to visit some of the other Scillies – there are five inhabited islands and around 120 islets and outcrops. Regular boat services link the main islands, though times and departure points vary daily due to the big tides; timetables are posted on noticeboards.

Bryher Boats runs daily services between Tresco and rugged **Bryher**, the smallest of the inhabited islands (£5 return; bryherboats.co.uk). Make the trip here to circuit its wild coast on foot, take a craft workshop at the studio of local artist Richard Pearce (rpearce.net) and sink a pint of Scilly Ale in the Fraggie Rock Bar.

Bryher Boats also connects Tresco to **St Martin's** (£9 return; Monday, Wednesday, Friday) and **St Agnes** (£9 return; Sunday, Tuesday, Thursday). Head to St Martin's to taste a tippie at the island vineyard. 🍷



WIN a special July escape to the most isolated Faroe isle



Just a two-hour flight from the UK, but a world away in feel, the Faroe Islands are unparalleled – and offer a unique island retreat

Visitors to the 18 Faroe Islands – which dot the ocean, midway between Iceland and Norway – struggle to find words to describe their experience.

This is an archipelago where towering sea cliffs defy the wild North Atlantic; where centuries of tradition are manifested in costume, song and dance; and where the 49,000 islanders – although under the protection of the Danish crown – are fiercely independent, speaking their own language, conducting their own political affairs and boasting their own national football team.

But at the same time the islanders are outward-looking and engaged with the world. Recently a distinctive Faroese cuisine, based on quality local produce, has developed, echoing fine dining trends across the Nordic world. In capital Tórshavn you'll find the shop run by Guðrun and Guðrun, the modern knitwear designers behind Sarah Lund's iconic jumpers in *The Killing*. And you could stay at a spectacularly situated house on a remote island...

STAY AT A SECLUDED SETTLEMENT STÓRA DÍMUN

At 2.5 sq km, Stóra Dímun – reachable by regular helicopter service from Tórshavn – is the smallest inhabited island of the Faroes. Forbidding yet enigmatic, its west coast is one giant sea cliff, reaching up to a dizzying 395m in places. It's a truly special spot, and the ideal place to feel the power of the waves, watch abundant seabirds and feast on fresh lamb.

Stóra Dímun is home to only Eva, Jógvan and their two children – plus hundreds of sheep. The family has just built a small schoolhouse, in the traditional timber- and turf-clad style, which they are renting out to travellers keen to experience the Faroes at their most wonderfully wild. This unique hideaway is much in demand, but Visit Faroe Islands has secured a two-night slot on 4-5 July, which two lucky readers could win.

As well as playing castaway on Stóra Dímun, the winners will spend two nights in Tórshavn, a great base for enjoying the town's fascinating galleries and museums, and delving deeper into this unbelievable archipelago.

How to win

Visit Faroe Islands and Atlantic Airways, which flies twice weekly from London Stansted to the Faroe Islands from June to August, are offering one lucky *Wanderlust* reader and their companion the chance to win a trip on **3-7 July**. It includes return flights from Stansted, two nights in Tórshavn, transfers and two nights at Stóra Dímun. To enter, answer the following:

Q: What is the population of Stóra Dímun?

a) 4 b) 14 c) 24

To enter, and for full terms & conditions, visit www.wanderlust.co.uk/competitions or send your answer and contacts on a postcard to the *Wanderlust* office (p2). State 'no offers' if you'd rather not be contacted by *Wanderlust* or sponsors. Closing date: 21 May 2014.


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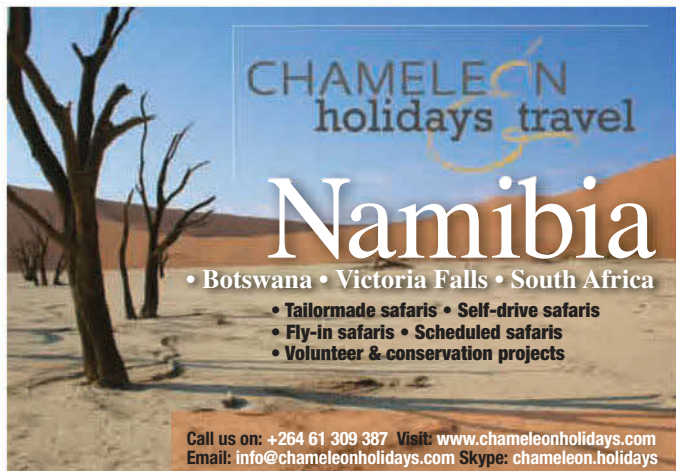


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■ Travel Company Tales



Llama Travel

Luca Newbold

Founder of Llama Travel, which specialises in trips to Latin America

How did Llama Travel start?

I first visited Peru 20 years ago, where I met and fell in love with my future wife, the beautiful Arequipena. We were married in the shadow of Machu Picchu and I ended up staying for several years, travelling to every corner of Peru and around South America. When we returned to the UK in 2001, I wanted to stay as involved as possible with Latin America. I saw that most organised holidays to South America were very expensive, meaning only backpackers or the wealthy could travel. So I set up Llama Travel with the aim of making such holidays more affordable.

What were the early challenges?

We've had our fair share of problems, like floods at Machu Picchu, a coup in Ecuador, erupting volcanos and landslides!

Airlines in Latin America are now generally very good, but in our early days we encountered issues. An airline in Argentina once temporarily suspended all

flights when two unions called a nationwide strike after a pilot and co-pilot had a fight prior to take off. On another occasion, Peru's two biggest airlines were involved in a legal dispute. There was a period of several days when judges were issuing rulings preventing the other airline from flying. This meant we were never quite sure which airline, if any, would be flying that day. We were changing flights at the very last minute to ensure our passengers were able to continue with their holidays.

Thankfully, we had made friends at the airlines and airports so we managed to get all our customers to their destinations. The experience prepared us for dealing with the Latin American way of life.

What makes Llama unique?

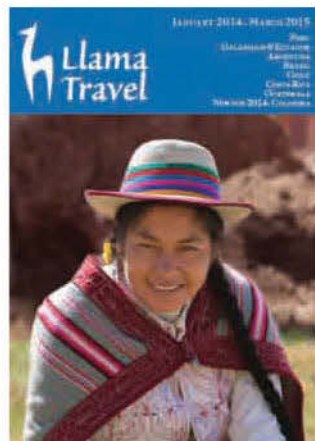
We don't offer every possible option, but we make sure we really know what we do sell and we do it as well as possible. We focus on offering high-quality, flexible holidays at the best price possible, with staff who really know what they are talking about.

We're so proud to have been awarded bronze in the Top Tour Operator category in the last two *Wanderlust* Reader Travel Awards.

Future plans?

We are Latin America specialists, but there is a lot of the region that we are yet to offer. We will add more destinations in future, but we want to make sure we are able to offer a great holiday at a great price before we launch a new programme.

www.llamatravel.com



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Man-made isle

With an issue jam-packed with wild and beautiful islands sculpted by nature, it felt only right that we pay homage to at least one man-made island that has stood the test of time. Built in the Victorian era to repel attacks from the French, naval base Spitbank Fort was retired by the MoD in the sixties. Flung out into the heart of the Portsmouth Solent and accessible only by boat, it has been transformed from a wartime stronghold to a quirky retreat for those who fancy shunning beaches for a night in a slice of British history. Formerly home to hundreds of soldiers and stockpiled ammo – it now offer nine suites, games rooms, a sauna, and a hot tub that looks across to the Isle of Wight. Float your boat? Rooms from £495pn...

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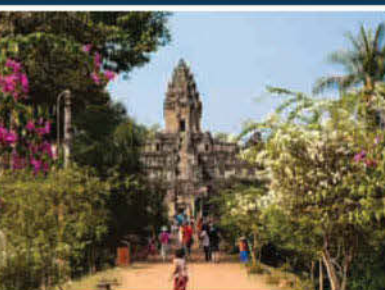
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